

COMMON WADDEN SEA SECRETARIAT

TRILATERAL WADDEN SEA COOPERATION ANNUAL REPORT 2022



TABLE OF

CONTENTS

03 Editorial
Dear reader

04 Towards a regenerative paradigm
Beyond sustainable development at the Wadden Sea

11 Youth perspectives on the first TriWadWalk
Crossing borders, blending perspectives, tracing futures

12 Trilateral Youth Conference
“Thriving with life”

16 Rights of Nature
Legal personality for the Wadden Sea?

18 Interreg project comes to an end
How nature and businesses benefit from PROWAD Link

22 Achievements and outlook
Trilateral Partnership Hub

24 Spotlight
Making Wadden Sea ports greener

26 Oris partnership
Intergenerational exchange and clean-up

27 Wadden Sea Day
Understanding connections between species

28 40th anniversary of Joint Declaration
Looking back and ahead

31 Anniversary
Five decades of World Heritage Convention

Anniversary
Wadden Sea Forum turned 20

32 Interview
“We don’t protect nature just for nature, but also for people”

34 Report Update
Several new thematic reports on QSR platform

36 The SIMP
Integrated Management Plan for One Wadden Sea World Heritage

38 Harbour and grey seals
New plan aids management of seal populations

40 SWIMWAY Initiative
Fish in the Wadden Sea – past, present and future

42 Global UNESCO project
Environmental DNA sampled in Wadden Sea

43 East Atlantic Flyway Youth Forum
More than 30 young adults learn tools on fundraising

44 Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative
Giving a frame to future activities

46 Wadden Sea Faces
Marre Walter

48 2023 Outlook

50 Wadden Sea Board members & advisors

EDITORIAL

DEAR READER

Karin Lochte © G. Born



The overarching theme of the 2022 edition of the annual report is a sustainable Wadden Sea. Sustainability does not mean to keep things as they are and preserve them. It is not static. It means that even under change the functionality of the system remains intact. It may not be the same as before, but it continues to be healthy. As we work towards a more sustainable way of life, we have to understand what type of change we are willing to accept and how we can ensure that natural processes can still go on. We need to find a way where both humankind and nature can proceed without harming each other.

In their lead article, Janne Liburd and Cormac Walsh call on us to revise our concept of growth towards a regenerative economy and look at how Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation can become a stronger player to tackle the transition. Janne and Cormac list a few suggestions, particularly on the

structure of our cooperation bodies, which are certainly worth consulting!

Sustainable development is not an entirely new topic in the Wadden Sea region and 2022 has been full of activities. This September, there was not only an international scientific field trip to the Danish and German Wadden Sea coast, called TriWadWalk. It was also the month of the first-ever trilateral youth conference, with over 40 young adults from Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands. I had the honour of participating in parts of the conference and this group of highly engaged, open, and mindful people was truly enriching.

We also look at the Rights of Nature movement and its development in the past years as well as the Interreg project "PROWAD Link", which, after four years, will be concluded by 2022. By linking sustainable growth and nature protection as its overarching aim, the project delivered many back-

ground studies and practical tools to use for sustainable entrepreneurship. And it pushed the development of the trilateral Wadden Sea World Heritage Partnership Hub, within the framework of which the first activities and initiatives have been created.

As this annual report is published at the 14th Trilateral Governmental Conference, we took a moment to reflect on the achievements of our Cooperation, very clearly mirrored by the sheer amount of anniversaries this year. And I was given the chance to reflect on my term as Chairperson to the Wadden Sea Board, which is ending with the Conference.

This year, the Quality Status Report received an update, with nine thematic reports having been newly written. Three thematic reports are currently being updated as well. The development of a single integrated management plan is also ending. The plan is up for adoption during the Confer-

ence - as is the Seal Management Plan for the next four years. Reports on the Swimway and Flyway Initiatives show the most recent activities.

In our spotlight, we talked with Arjen Bosch and Marine Perrin, representing the Wadden Sea ports and green NGOs, about the challenges and fruits of their cooperation. And Marre Walter is introduced as this edition's "Wadden Sea Face".

We wish you an interesting reading.

Karin Lochte
Chairperson of the
Wadden Sea Board

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TOWARDS A REGENERATIVE PARADIGM

BEYOND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT THE WADDEN SEA



Participants of the TriWadWalk crossing boundaries on Rømø © A. Orth

The Wadden Sea is recognised internationally as an exemplar of transboundary cooperation in nature conservation. World Heritage Site designation was awarded to the Wadden Sea in recognition of its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). This unique quality makes the Wadden Sea stand out on a global scale and occupy a special place in the hearts and minds of countless visitors and residents. Still, the OUV continues to be at risk due to the impacts of human activities on land and at sea. The Wadden Sea is flanked by a coastline that has been massively transformed through coastal defence, land drainage and reclamation, industrial agriculture, harbour activity, and mass tourism. On the seaside, the Wadden Sea transitions seamlessly into the North Sea, one of the most intensively used and heavily impacted sea spaces in the world^{1,2}. In order to safeguard the integrity of the Wadden Sea and secure good environmental status for the North Sea as a whole, as required under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008), we will, of necessity, see increased emphasis on ecosystem restoration in the coming years and decades. Against this background, it is imperative that Wadden Sea management takes broader perspectives – thematically, geographically, and scientifically – to explicitly consider the actual and potential activities taking place within the ecosystem’s marine and terrestrial hinterlands, within the Wadden Sea itself, and how they relate to each other.

With the inscription of the Wadden Sea as a transboundary World Heritage Site came a request by the World Heritage Committee to develop a single integrated management plan

with the purpose of further facilitating the continuous improvement of transboundary management coordination for the protection and maintenance of the Outstanding Universal Value. In the following, we will argue that sustainable development and cooperation are no longer enough. Striving to maintain equilibrium on a dynamic planet is an oxymoron in the Anthropocene marred by biodiversity loss and the climate crisis, not to mention historical global inequality³. We need to replenish and restore what the planet has lost. Offsetting carbon or nudging behavioural change are obsolete. Unlike sustainable development, the starting point for regenerative sustainability is not about doing less harm or developing technological and political solutions to ensure continued growth. Rather, it is about examining and understanding the values, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that drive human behaviour and enable nature and all beings to flourish.

Our arguments rest on more than a decade of research experience in the Wadden Sea and, in the case of the first author, managerial insights as chairperson of the Danish Wadden Sea National Park and member of the trilateral Wadden Sea Board. These are further inspired by and accompanied by images from an international field trip, TriWadWalk, to the Danish-German Wadden Sea coast and islands undertaken in September 2022. The field trip developed from longstanding collaboration between Wadden Sea researchers and educators at the universities of Bremen, Groningen, Hamburg, Lüneburg, Oldenburg, and Southern Denmark and was generously supported by the

Common Wadden Sea Secretariat within the framework of the Partnership Hub, Wadden Academy, the Danish Wadden Sea National Park, and the University of Southern Denmark.

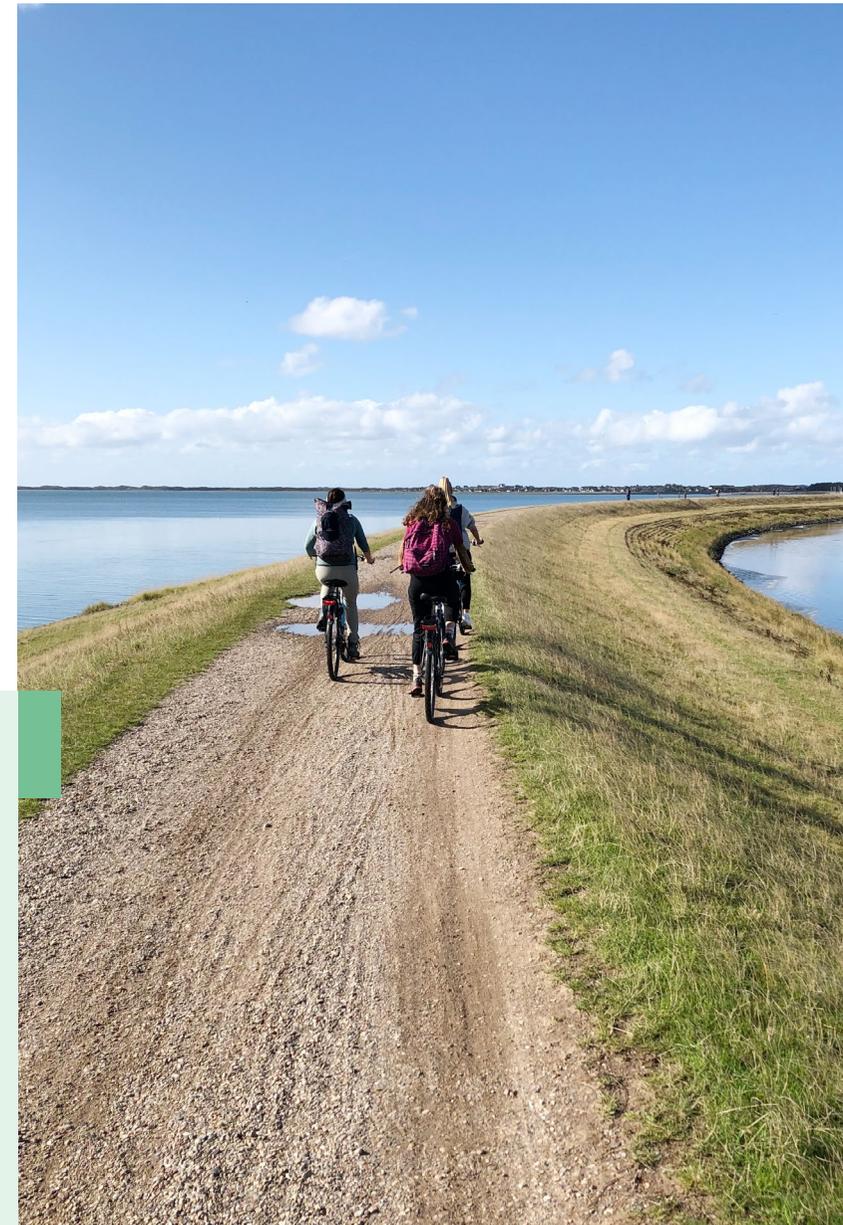
Valuing nature at the Wadden Sea

How do humans value nature and why is this relevant? Wadden Sea management to date has focused primarily on the intrinsic value of Wadden Sea nature. It is a perspective that values nature for its own sake, independent of how we as people relate to or derive benefit from Wadden Sea nature. This concept of intrinsic value is reflected in that of outstanding universal value, which emphasises a global, universal dimension, independent of local place-based contexts or societal perceptions⁴. The German

“A perspective that values nature for its own sake, independent of how we as people relate to or derive benefit from Wadden Sea nature”



Experiencing diverse natures at the Rantum Basin, Sylt. © Cormac Walsh



national parks go a step further, seeking to preserve the 'pristine' nature of the Wadden Sea as an untouched natural landscape or wilderness^{5,6}. From a Dutch perspective, greater emphasis is on the value of the 'openness' of the Wadden landscape and the protection of the darkness of the night sky. These are elements that are of value to Wadden Sea ecology, but also address aspects which are at the core of why the Wadden Sea is of value to us as people seeking quiet, peace of mind, and, perhaps, solace or adventure in this unique landscape at the boundary of the land and the sea⁷. Similarly, the management plan and ethos of the Danish Wadden Sea National Park places emphasis on the interweaving of natural and cultural heritage and the interconnectedness of the Wadden Sea mudflats and salt-marshes with the islands, marshlands, and coastal landscape more broadly⁸. Increasingly heritage is recognised to be dynamic, interrelated, and complex; a perspective that is beginning to inform thinking on site designation and management at UNESCO level⁹. At the Wadden Sea, we see a rich diversity of values informing current protected area management policy and practice.

The social sciences and humanities are particularly well positioned to advance understanding of relational values, particularly where an understanding of why and how coastal communities and visitors value and relate to the Wadden Sea can aid in its protection and restoration as an ecosystem of local, national, and global importance. Current research topics in this field of direct relevance to Wadden Sea conservation concern the question of

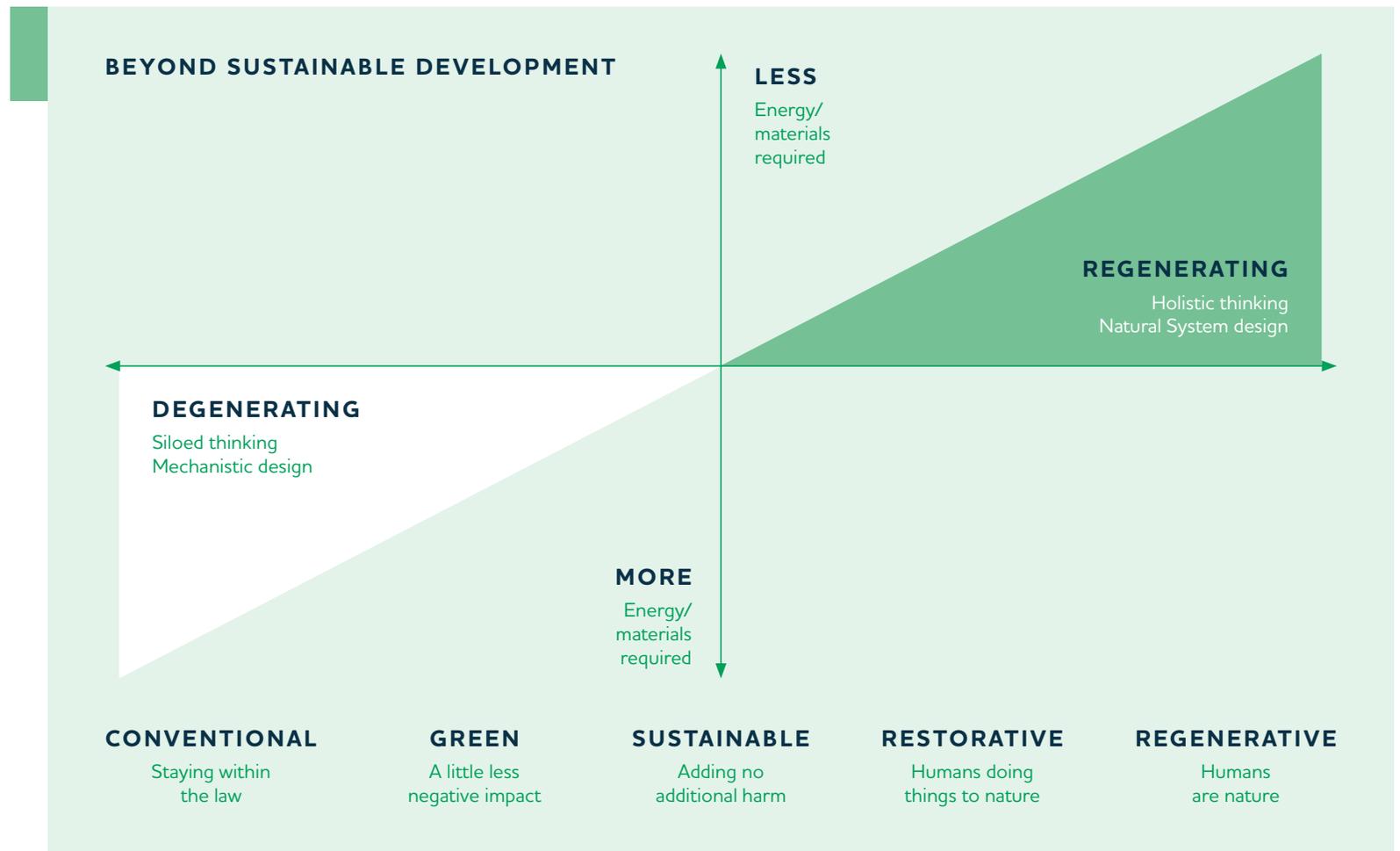
how relational perspectives on nature, landscape, and value can foster more dynamic and holistic approaches to protected area management^{10,11}. Here we can ask how volunteers, whether residents, second home owners or tourists, may contribute to healthier

nature and healthier people^{12,13}. It is increasingly evident that the natural and cultural heritage of the Wadden Sea are fundamentally intertwined with each other^{14,3,11}. A related strand of research addresses how human values guide stewardship in protected areas.

Stewardship theory does not reject individual motivations but suggests that those involved gain benefit by putting the interests of others above their own and pursuing actions that generate their own intrinsic rewards¹⁵. The concept of stewardship puts emphasis

on the people involved in nature conservation efforts, their personal values, and dynamic interrelations^{4,16}.

Towards a regenerative paradigm
As depicted in graphic below, sustainability is no longer to be seen as an



Inspired by Fullerton (2015) Regenerative Capitalism. Capital Institute: Greenwich, CT, USA

intended dynamic equilibrium between humans and ecosystem (e.g. the 1987 Brundtland Report). Both restorative and regenerative efforts are needed in the Anthropocene.

A regenerative perspective requires integrated understanding of the past, present, and future of the Wadden Sea, thus transgressing existing conceptual and geographical boundaries. It requires a radical shift of perspectives and catalysing opportunities for collaboration and future imagination.

Regeneration is indicative of a holistic and proactive attitude i.e., to manifest flourishing living systems and to imagine and actively seek to enable sustainable transitions with others. Developing with (not for) others is the quintessential expression of an ethical, ongoing involvement through respect for others and the non-human other beings in the world¹⁷. A regenerative paradigm is not anti-growth. It simply insists that we grow the things that matter most to us in ways that benefit the entire system and never at the expense of others. Humans are nature too. Herein lie the latent possibilities to undo current lock-ins and critically engage with the wicked problems of the 21st century. It calls for inter- and transdisciplinary research collaboration, and radically different ways of managing and educating for unknown futures^{18,19,20}.

Collaboration for transformative governance practices

The long history of trilateral cooperation notwithstanding, we find a high level of diversity in protected area management practices. Wadden Sea management continues to be em-



Walking in the mobile dunes and learning why disturbance can be beneficial. List mobile dunes. Sylt. © E. Trell

bedded in local place-based contexts. It is influenced by wider governance cultures, ways of working, and local, social, and cultural values. Indeed, local and regional structures are necessary to ensure the legitimacy and accountability of Wadden Sea management and to

allow for community participation in decision-making. In the past, the designation of national parks and the Wadden Sea as a World Heritage Site has led to highly polarised debates, founded on rigid dichotomies^{21,8}. A number of these key dichotomies are listed below.

Nature conservation has for a long time been on the defensive and has consequently and understandably adopted principled positions. The primary dyke line has taken on symbolic importance as a 'hard boundary' separating protected nature from

the surrounding cultural landscape²². Polarised debates, however, limit the scope for dialogue and learning from diverse perspectives. Evidence from the Wadden Sea and elsewhere indicates that pluralist governance structures and openness to diverse ways of knowing and caring for the Wadden Sea are particularly conducive to fostering inclusive and transformative dialogue²³. Acknowledging and recognising a plurality of values and perspectives and making space for lively debate leads to engaged learning processes and allows for broader, multifaceted discussions on both future conservation actions as well as the relationship between the Wadden Sea and processes of socio-ecological transformation at regional and societal levels.

We have found examples of more integrated approaches emerging over the last decade. The current management plan for the Danish Wadden Sea National Park, for example, emphasises inclusive participation: "The National Park Plan is... not just the plan of the committee, council and secretariat – it is the plan of the whole National Park"²⁴. The Dutch Wadden Spatial Agenda 2050 explicitly brings together perspectives from the islands, the coast, and the Wadden Sea itself in the form of an integrated cross-sectoral strategy looking towards 2050. The establishment and expansion of the Biosphere Reserve Development Zone in Lower Saxony indicates a willingness to cross the dyke line and make new connections across the regional hinterland of the Wadden Sea.

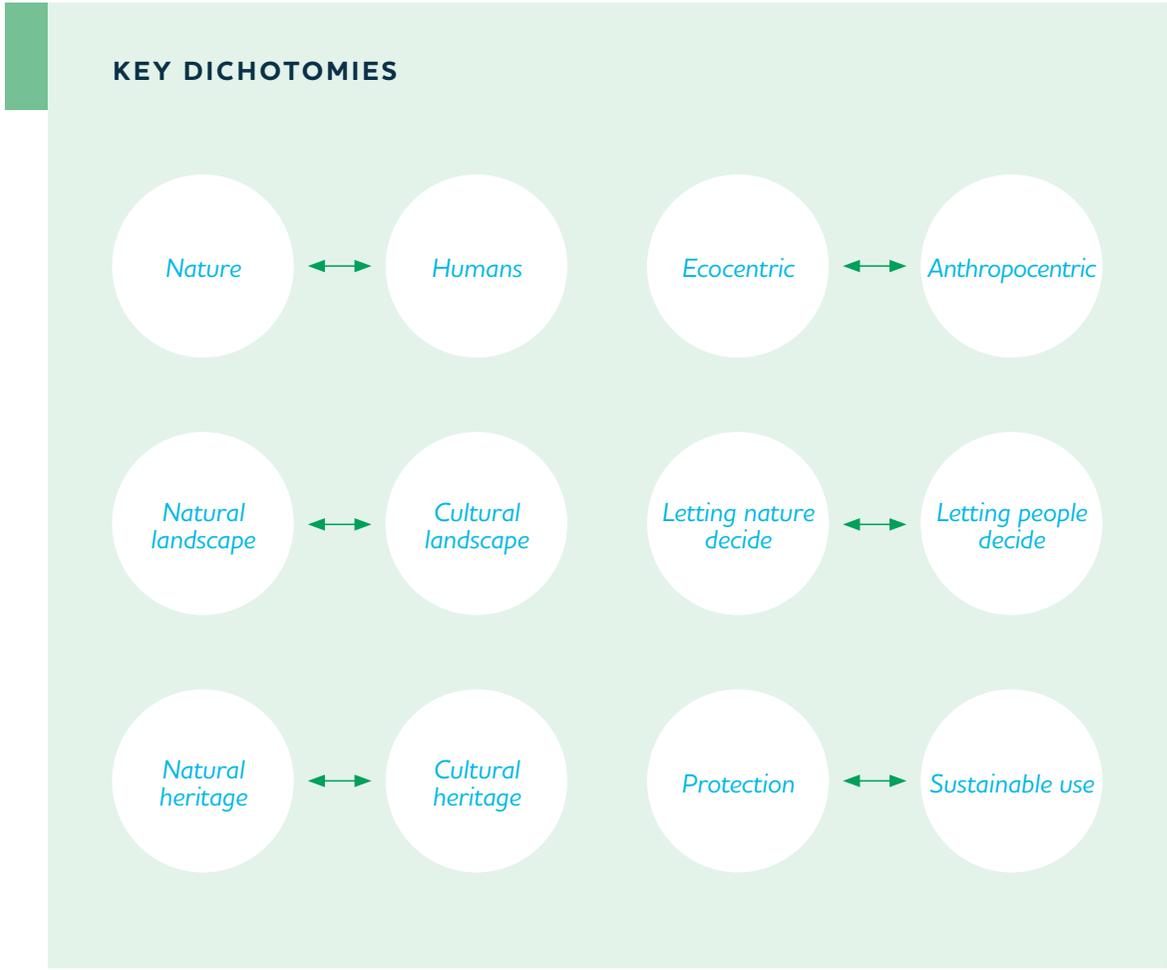
Lastly, the formal governance arrangements at UNESCO World Her-

itage Sites are often complemented by stewardship that involves alliances across local, national, and international levels. Stewardship alliances between those holding similar values of nature may be central to ensuring the integrity and the Outstanding Universal Value of the Wadden Sea. Changes in alliances are evidence of adaptive processes in response to the increasing vulnerabilities of exposed systems and the potential for disruption and crises.

Conclusions and outlook

The Wadden Sea Board, the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, and partners are uniquely positioned to begin to experiment with how multi- and transdisciplinary collaborations can be enabled to get beyond business as usual and engage in regenerative world-making. Breaking down institutional and disciplinary boundaries may mean loss of power and resources for existing institutional structures, but it can also serve to enable more dynamic and flexible forms of networked multi-stakeholder partnership. A focus on regeneration requires a renewed focus on the future of Wadden Sea nature and nature-society relations. This implies a shift away from perspectives which judge present actions against an idealised historical vision of the Wadden Sea as a pure natural landscape. The Wadden Sea region may be viewed as a living laboratory, one where many of the tensions and contradictions of contemporary society are placed in sharp relief by the presence of the Wadden Sea World Heritage and the many potentials it represents.

Understanding the human values of nature and UNESCO World Heritage



stewardship reveals potential for advancing protected area management mechanisms. Collaboration for intentional change with others is needed to guide regenerative development in an unpredictable world. These insights are of pivotal importance to other UNESCO World Heritage Sites to proactively engage in systemic changes at multiple levels, whether triggered by climate change, site management, or competing interests in protected areas (e.g., when compromised by neo-liberal (or other) ideologies, for instance, to increase visitation or use of natural resources). In particular, UNESCO and World Heritage Site managers should be warned against compromising conservation values, while recognising natural and cultural heritage as intertwined and mutually reinforcing. 

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YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON THE FIRST TRIWADWALK

CROSSING BORDERS, BLENDING PERSPECTIVES, TRACING FUTURES

The objective of the first Trilateral Wadden Walk (TriWadWalk in short) was to invite researchers and students from universities in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands to explore the Dutch-German and German-Danish border regions in the Wadden Sea to foster collaboration. This essay is the response to a call for young voices' perspectives on the experience.

Across borders of the Wadden Sea coast

Anchoring the itineraries along the borders made sense at a metaphorical level; to enable encounters across cultures that inform practice and research on the Wadden Sea. While traveling, however, we sensed a kind of protective friction between the countries' different approaches to working with nature, a dissatisfaction with what "the others" were doing, which also made crossing borders sensible at a philosophical level. We began unpacking the meanings that borders and barriers hold in the landscape and explored the potential for a sense of trilateral kinship. The establishment of national parks was undoubtedly an act for nature, but it seems that the infrastructure

supposedly serving to protect nature is ultimately there for people's utility and their sense of protection from each other's natures. But nature doesn't discriminate. It isn't detained by national borders. The North Sea ebbs and flows regardless.

Perspectives across generations involved

While we encountered geographical and physical borders in the Wadden Sea, there were also invisible generational divisions at play. We noticed these in discussions when we were clearly divided on the subject of human intervention in nature. And while we as the young generation perceive ourselves as being charged with the responsibility of continuously (re)shaping critical perspectives, we felt confronted with positions that seemed no longer up for debate. As the sciences evolve and we begin grasping new ways of knowing the world and nature, should we not enable each other to change our minds as we learn? That's certainly how we understand the value of interdisciplinary collaboration. These tenuous discussions, after which we nevertheless ended up standing in a circle, facing each other, anticipat-

ing more desirable futures together, became reminders of the importance of investing time in blending perspectives, not only across cultures but also across generations.

Traces of desirable Wadden Sea futures

The question remains as to how to leverage the experiences, encounters, tensions, and potential for collaboration with a view to different Wadden Sea futures. We dare you to entertain the thought of one unilateral Wadden Sea with us in order to imagine how else we might foreground nature futures in a One Global Heritage practice culture. What if we were to begin wondering about, caring for, and working with the Wadden Sea outside any concept of nationality? **What if Wadden Sea World Heritage Site were to become one unified entity governed with its own interests in mind?** How might human and more-than-human citizens then be regarded in decision-making? There is room to liberate the structures that are inhibiting collaboration and other-regarding ways, and as one of the Wadden Sea experts said along the way: "If the area has changed socio-ecologically in the past, maybe it can change again in the future." 

TriWadWalk group in dunes © Birthe Menke



TRILATERAL YOUTH CONFERENCE

“THRIVING WITH LIFE”



The participants of the Trilateral Youth Conference © Waverunner/ Lukas Gottwald

The first Trilateral Youth Conference (TYC) was held from 1 to 4 September 2022 in St. Peter-Ording, Germany, and brought together young adults from all over the Wadden Sea region. In this vibrant atmosphere, people from different fields of expertise shared their enthusiasm, motivations, and current contributions. They also discussed perspectives for the future of youth engagement in the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site.

The conference provided a platform for exchange of knowledge, experience, and information between the participating volunteers, students, researchers, young professionals, and entrepreneurs. One focus was an exchange on different types of involvement and the participants' relationships to the partner organisations which selected them. The discussions, enriched by daily experiences and innovative ideas, led to the initiative of developing and launching a trilateral youth network.

One crucial type of involvement is volunteering. Former and current volunteers from Germany presented the voluntary services, which include tasks such as giving guided tours, monitoring the area, and assisting in scientific work in the German Wadden Sea National Parks, nature conservation organisations, and research institutions. For Ben Rating, the voluntary year was "one of the greatest experiences that I've ever had. My engagement created a deep connection to the Wadden Sea, which is a once-in-a-lifetime feeling". This was shared by other participants, who are active in the Watt^oN network that

connects current and former volunteers of the Lower Saxon Wadden Sea National Park from all over Germany. Volunteering programmes on Danish and Dutch islands were also highlighted. On the Dutch islands, young adults are trained to guide tours that allows people to change their perception of the Wadden Sea "from seeing it as a big mud pool to realising it's a place that's thriving with life", as Sara Koek puts it.

Besides living in the region, many participants are bachelor, master, and doctoral students engaged in research activities about seal populations, tourism, birds, plant species, and climate change. Many have intertwined their personal goals with ecological issues of their research. For instance, Isabel Hunter shared her achievement of the summer, which was following the breeding success of beach-nesting shorebirds, which could help protect the species in the future: "It is important to protect the most unique and wild nature we have left in Denmark". Discussion of topics of interest and key insights gave way to numerous possibilities of support. Likewise, the experience of entrepreneurs and young professionals in public and private sectors gave a roadmap of the possible career paths to pursue.

During the conference, the group was introduced to the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC). On a mudflat walk, they interacted with the landscape and created bonds between each other. During the conference, the group envisioned and explored different futures of the Wadden Sea using a forecasting approach to enhance creative thinking and extract

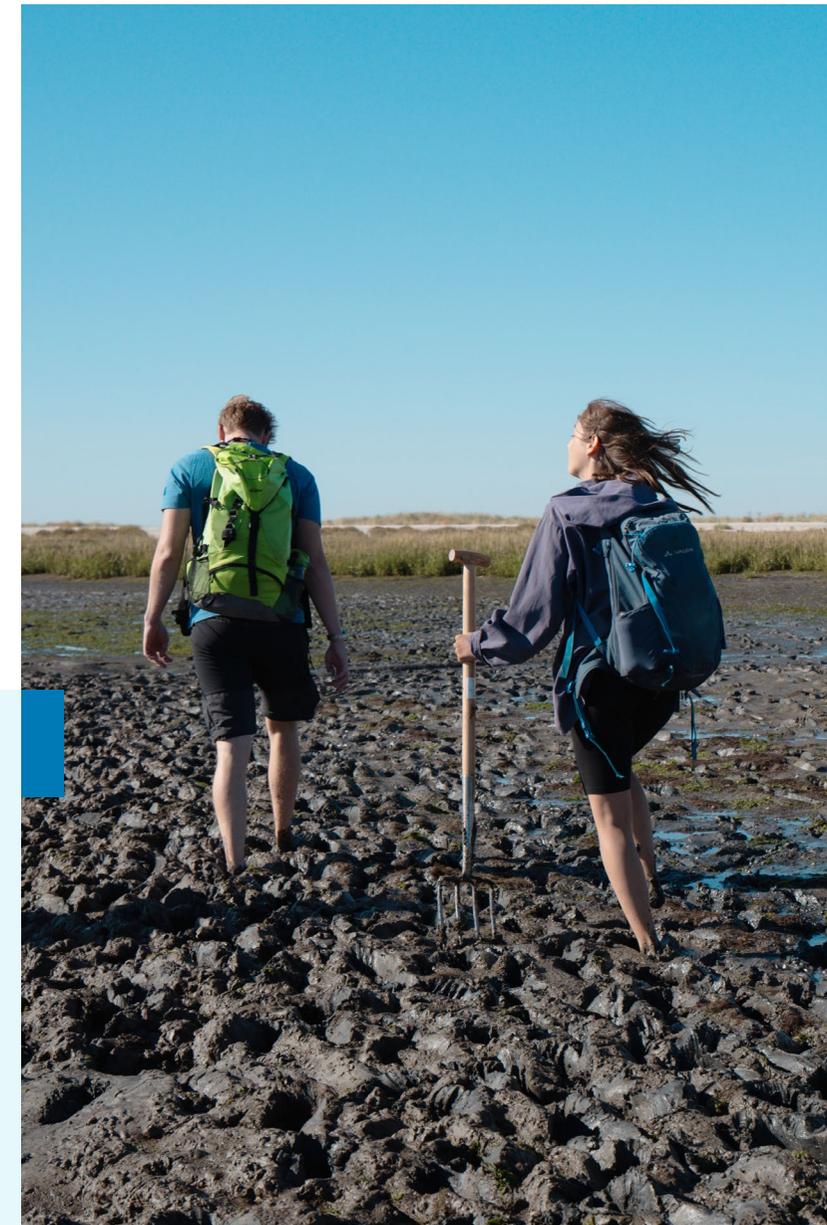
fundamental questions and topics of interest that the youth messages will revolve around. Beyond the official programme, the participants spontaneously formed groups to discuss relevant topics and ways to mobilise and organise themselves after the event. The follow-up process, coordinated by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS), aims to enhance communication with and between the participants, fill in information gaps, and support the elaboration of messages for the Trilateral Governmental Conference.

To the TYC participants it is clear that empowering youth can speed up processes to tackle the climate change and biodiversity loss crises as much as bringing ideas and support the Trilateral Cooperation's work. Kees Hogenboom

"One of the greatest experiences that I've ever had. My engagement created a deep connection to the Wadden Sea, which is a once-in-a-lifetime feeling"



Participants of the Trilateral Youth Conference experiencing the mudflats © Waverunner/ Lukas Gottwald



emphasises that “the Wadden Sea is a wonderful area with its dynamic system, local culture, diversity in species and a broad variety of functions. Because of this, it is complex but also interesting, and of course, important to take care of”. Sara Koek adds that “it is important to educate and involve people, not only on Wadden Sea ecology but also by sharing personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions, especially as youth”. Roberta Schütte concludes that “the Trilateral Youth Conference was the start of something bigger. Feeling each other’s motivation and engagement strengthened our desire for a network that we can use to stay in touch, proceed with mutual learning, and get involved in the governance of the Wadden Sea”.

The Trilateral Youth Conference was organised by CWSS on behalf of the TWSC. It was hosted by the Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea National Park Authority and sponsored by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) with funds from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV). 

BICYCLE JOURNEY

When we think of sustainable transportation, the first thing that comes to mind is travel by train, which was also considered the main mode of transport to get to the TYC. An even more sustainable alternative, the bicycle, did not cross most people’s minds and we were all delighted to hear that Annemoon Tiemens planned to travel by bike. Upon hearing about the journey, another participant decided to tag along.

On Friday, 26 August 2022, Annemoon’s bicycle journey started on Schiermonnikoog in the Netherlands. Together with her boyfriend Arthur, after around 210 kilometres they crossed the Dutch-German border to meet Hannah Müssener in Dornumersiel, Germany. They spent the evening together and prepared for the next days.

On 30 August, they continued the adventure together. For Hannah it was the first longer bicycle tour. Though

starting fully energised, they missed their first ferry leading to a forced lunch break. In Bremerhaven, they cycled through the traffic-packed city centre and then decided to take a gravel path through the forest for a more pleasant way.

At the end of the first day together, they spent the night in a fruit garden owned by friendly people. In the morning, hunting buzzards dropped their prey next to the tent. Pure nature! With high speed, they continued along the Elbe to reach the second ferry. Crossing the Elbe river, they could watch sleeping seals from a privileged spot. After a few more kilometres, they got to their penultimate stop and had home-picked beans for dinner that evening.

“Flying finish” to their destination with the best tailwind, they reached St. Peter-Ording on 1 September around midday. They were



Annemoon and Hannah on the route © Carmac Walsh

happy to have finally arrived and incredibly hungry. They checked in, refuelled, and dove into the activities of the conference. In total, Annemoon cycled an incredible 570 km from Schiermonnikoog to St. Peter-Ording, of which she had Hannah’s company for about 360km. They shared their trip on a blog and through social media and impressed organisers and other participants alike with their great achievement.

After the conference, Hannah went back by train, while Annemoon was set on cycling home. Together with Arthur,

she made it to Ootmarsum in the Netherlands, before her knee started to hurt and it was no longer possible for her to continue the trip by bike. On Annemoon’s blog, there are details of this amazing journey and other adventures: windfietser.wordpress.com.

We are impressed and inspired by this show of sustainable and alternative transportation by Annemoon and Hannah and hope that their experience motivates us to think about our choice of transport when travelling for work or vacation.



RESULTS OF A PRE-EVENT SURVEY AMONG THE TYC'S PARTICIPANTS



RIGHTS OF NATURE

LEGAL PERSONALITY FOR THE WADDEN SEA?

Attention on the concept of Rights of Nature has been growing; the saltwater Lagoon of Mar Menor in southeastern Spain recently became the first ecosystem in Europe granted legal personality. Also in 2022, the World Council of Churches, the largest oecumenical organisation in the world, issued a statement calling for support for the Rights of Nature.

The origin of the Rights of Nature (RoN) concept dates back to 1972. It states that environmental objects should be granted legal personhood and thus be able to defend themselves in court through representation by the public. The common ground of the RoN movement is the shared view that a systematic change in our society is needed to tackle the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, by putting animals, plants, and ecosystems on the same plane as humans. This requires a fundamental rethinking of the purpose of law. Nearly all legal systems were designed only to benefit people. The movement calls for shifting from an

anthropocentric view to an ecocentric view, and recognising natural entities as subjects of rights rather than objects or property.

Back in the 1970s, the concept did not receive broad recognition due to the environmental legislation of the next decades alongside, *inter alia*, allowing environmental NGOs to stand in court to challenge decision making under these laws. In the 21st century, it has grown more prominent again. In 2008, Ecuador was the first to incorporate the RoN into its Constitution. Article 71 states that “Nature or Pachamama [Mother Earth], where life is reproduced and exists, has the right for that existence to be respected entirely and for its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes to be maintained and regenerated”. In Europe, so far only a few countries, Germany included, have the RoN recognised in their constitution.

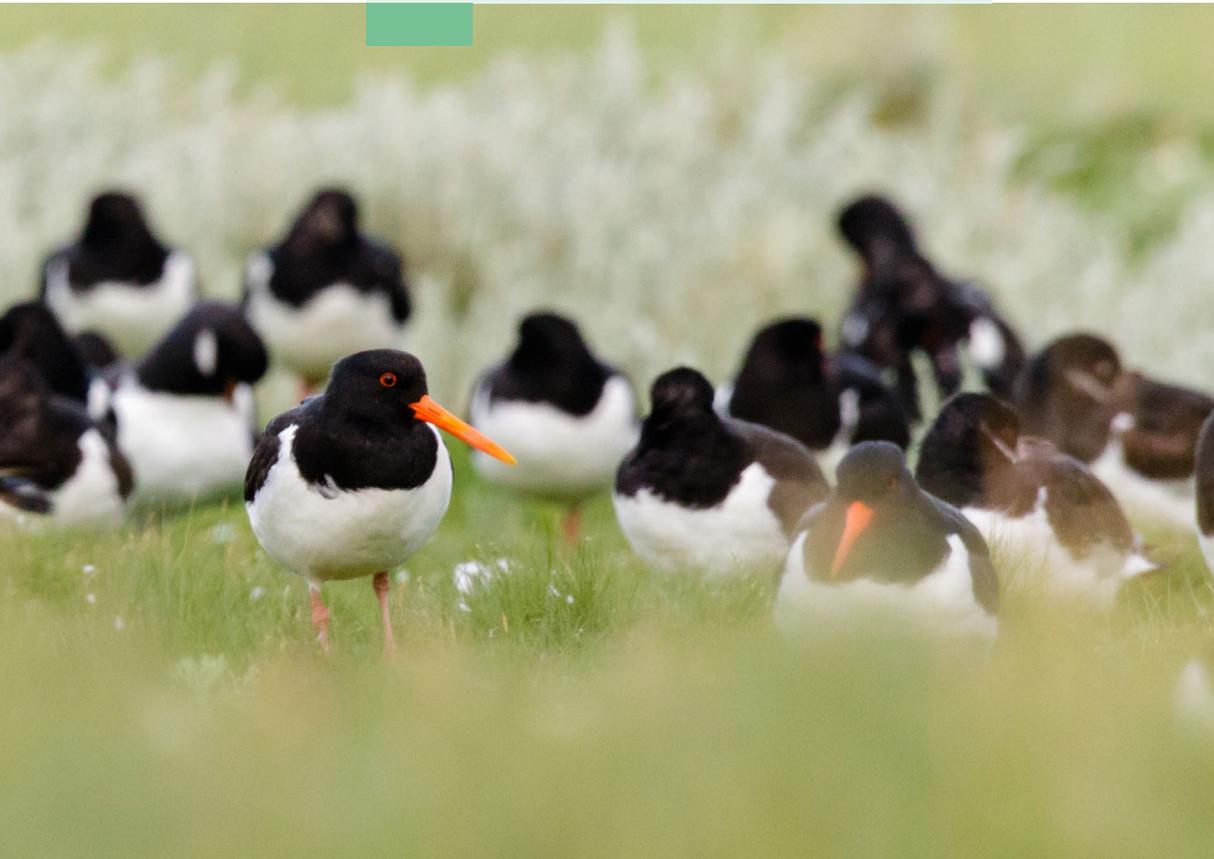
Catalysed by this constitutional change, the prevalence of laws

Flock of oystercatchers © Christian Wiedemann/ NAKUWA





“Nature or Pacha Mama [Mother Earth], where life is reproduced and exists, has the right for that existence to be respected entirely and for its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes to be maintained and regenerated”



granting rights to nature has considerably increased. In the United States, approximately 200 municipalities have passed ordinances that grant rights to nature in some manner. In New Zealand, the Whanganui River was granted legal personhood in 2012. Other examples are the river Ganges and the Glaciers of Yamunotri in India, and the Magpie river in Canada. In 2021, in the Dutch coastal municipality of Dongeradeel, a council decision was adopted to grant legal rights to the Wadden Sea in the form of a ‘Natureship’, i.e. to institutionalise the ecology interests of the Wadden Sea as a separate stakeholder.

In 2012, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) acknowledged the need in their resolution on the incorporation of the RoN in decision making. In it, IUCN member states noted that global production and consumption patterns had “led to biodiversity loss, deterioration of ecosystems, environmental pollution, a decline in the quality and quantity of available water and a worsening of the problems related to global warming”, while “shown to be inadequate when it comes to combating poverty and improving the quality of life of most of the world’s popula-

tion.” The resolution called for advocating the concept of RoN in order to contribute towards the reconciliation between human beings and earth.

Given biodiversity loss, the climate crisis and pollution, as well as their pressures on the Wadden Sea ecosystem, RoN entails several aspects of potential added value for Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation. Even though it is not yet proven that RoN might give the solution, the three Wadden Sea countries will examine the concept in the coming years. In the Wilhelmshaven Declaration 2022, they plan to “explore the potential benefits of adapting elements from the concept of “Rights of Nature” to our common Wadden Sea World Heritage in support of the Guiding Principle and thereby advancing our approach to protect the Outstanding Universal Value and adding value to the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation”. We welcome this approach as our precious Wadden Sea World Heritage deserves the exploration of any concept and possibility which might contribute to or even improve the sustainable protection of the Wadden Sea for the next generations of species, including the human. 

INTERREG PROJECT COMES TO AN END

HOW NATURE AND BUSINESSES BENEFIT FROM PROWAD LINK

“Wadden Sea World Heritage has become a renowned brand for an internationally recognised nature area”



Family vacationing on a beach © Niclas Jessen

After four years, the Inter-reg project “Prowad Link – Protect and Prosper” will be concluded by the end of 2022. The project’s primary aim has been to create benefits by linking sustainable growth with nature protection, thus unlocking the potential of natural areas as a driver for jobs and sustainable development. The project’s areas are the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site, the Norwegian Geiranger Fjord, also part of a World Heritage Site, and the British Wash & North Norfolk Coast.

Many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are often not aware of opportunities of protected nature areas such as national parks and World Heritage Sites. They face challenges in developing innovative and targeted products that adequately transmit the nature brand narrative of their area. The brand can provide market access and create benefits for both SMEs and the environment. Here are examples of project activities supporting this nature-business-benefit-cycle. Through its project partners, Prowad Link provides an exhaustive library on green tourism and sustainability for SMEs to serve as blueprints and tools to adopt the sustainability agenda properly. Several deliverables from the project can directly assist SMEs in their transition to sustainability.

The project has enhanced and extended existing partnership programmes in the regions and developed new ones, such as the World Heritage Partnership category in the Danish National Park and the new Dutch Wadden Sea World Heritage

ambassador programme. A transnational Wadden Sea World Heritage Partnership concept was developed and implemented to connect local and national partner programmes and networks, supporting knowledge exchange, transnational activities, and project developments.

Wadden Sea World Heritage has become a renowned brand for an internationally recognised nature area. To activate this brand towards promoting sustainable development of the area and the Wadden Sea’s protection, the area’s stakeholders now have access to the brand narrative, free-to-use footage, co-creation opportunities, and partnering information via the online branding toolbox at waddensea.brandspace.online.

A trilateral visitor survey conducted in 2020–2021, covering the entire destination of the Wadden Sea World Heritage in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, provides valuable market insights. Its output shows that over 90 per cent of guests know that the Wadden Sea is designated as a World Heritage Site. Nature protection and information about nature experience are important aspects to the visitors. The status also plays a role in the travel decision for more than half of the Danish interviewees and about 40 per cent of the interviewees in Germany and the Netherlands. More than 80 per cent of visitors want nature at the destination to be protected and prefer to experience an intact nature away from large tourist crowds. For more than 70 per cent it is, moreover, important to learn something about the region as well as the nature at their destination.

Guided mudflat walk © Red Star



Besides managing access to funding opportunities, SMEs can confront size-related resource constraints, skill deficits, and knowledge limitations when it comes to adopting sustainable practices and seizing green growth plans. Prowad Link aims at seeding an eco-friendly business culture and practising the philosophy of sustainable development for small tourism businesses. This vision led to the development of tenseducation.com, a resource web page for enterprises, teachers, students, and others interested in sustainable entrepreneurship, particularly within the tourism sector. The recognition of the importance of sustainable development capacity building across the sector and appropriate skills and expertise are focal for fuelling the momentum of change within SMEs.

Pursuing sustainable entrepreneurship brings along long-term financial benefits and nature conservation. Ecolabels can serve as a method to help diversify SME gains safely in areas where biodiversity is high. Under the auspices of Prowad Link, a bundle of reports on [ecolabelling](#) and SMEs has been developed. They present a series of recommendations that SMEs can consider when developing a sustainability strategy, including the importance of identifying and choosing the right ecolabels. The purpose of these documents is to provide guidance on how to adopt and implement an effective sustainability strategy for SMEs and help disseminate the sustainability agenda.

Naturally, implementing a sustainable entrepreneurship strategy can be

coupled with a set of challenges for any SME, especially those operating in a sensitive World Heritage area; but these challenges can be surmounted with the right strategies. Under the Prowad Link project, entrepreneurs can get access to studies that help identify the [barriers to sustainable entrepreneurship](#) in a World Heritage area. These reports put forward recommendations of strategies that can be used to encourage sustainable entrepreneurship in SMEs operating in the Wadden Sea. The overall aim is to attain better understanding of the mechanisms that contribute to the increase of sustainable entrepreneurship in the World Heritage area. SMEs can also have access to reports on coping strategies and solutions developed by tourism SMEs across different sites in partner countries during the pandemic.

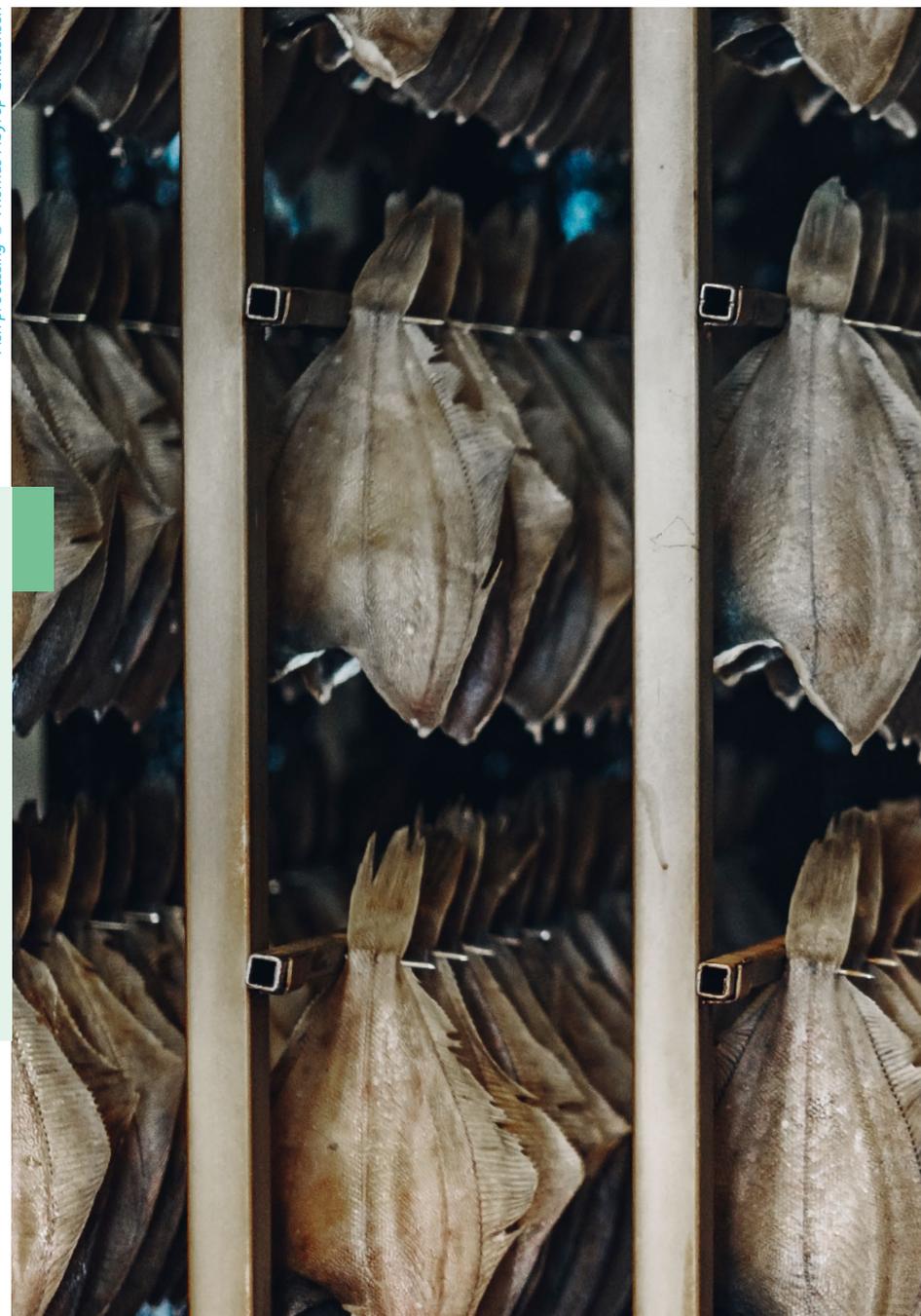
As the project recognises the need for desk research studies to help identify and show important trends in the markets for nature-based tourism, SMEs also have access to a [study](#) that provides such an overview. The report helps raise awareness about the various trends that are driving change and that could affect the operations of SMEs. It provides crucial insight into how changing trends and customer preferences will open up new market opportunities for nature-based tourism. Identifying the most important trends and their implications, as well as the next steps, can serve as a blueprint to help SMEs seize different market opportunities.

To further facilitate SME transition to sustainability, the [Wadden Sea Tourism Radar](#) introduces a method

“Prowad Link aims at seeding an eco-friendly business culture and practising the philosophy of sustainable development for small tourism businesses”



Fish processing © Thomas Heyrup Christensen





that helps destinations to recognise in good time when and in which area this limit is being reached. The Radar is an instrument that can be used to determine, along defined criteria, whether current tourism activities at the destination are negatively affecting the environment for people, animals, and plants, and whether they are threatening the values for which the Wadden Sea has been recognised as a World Heritage Site. If this is the case, the degree of impairment is determined and appropriate measures are agreed upon to return to a healthy level. In this way, the Wadden Sea Tourism Radar can and should serve as a navigation aid on the road to sustainability in tourism.

As the project's goal has been to help start a long-term transition process for SME strategies from profit only to environmentally friendly processes, SMEs have access to resources on [best practices examples](#) and heritage assets in the region to help promote a wide exchange of good practices. They showcase key examples of sustainable tourism businesses in the region, which protect critical environmental and cultural resources as well as use them to be prosperous businesses within a simplified sustainable business model framework.

[The Wadden Sea Funding Guide](#) (see info box on page 23) features a wealth of funding opportunities to support the collaborative, cross-sectoral trilateral work aligned with the core objectives of the trilateral Wadden Sea World Heritage partnership.

Prowad Link is intended as an investment for the future of sustainable

tourism. The end goal of this long-term investment is to accompany SMEs on their sustainability journey and help them operate sustainable businesses in touristic natural areas, to engage them in the protection of these nature areas as part of their business model, to improve their resource efficiency, and to cope with the changing world. ~~~~~



ACHIEVEMENTS AND OUTLOOK

TRILATERAL PARTNERSHIP HUB



Activities and projects within the framework of the Partnership Hub successfully continued during 2022. In addition, an evaluation of the Partnership Hub's pilot phase was carried out. Now, three years after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding "Trilateral Partnership in support of the UNESCO Wadden Sea World Heritage", it is time to have a look at some of the main achievements and lessons learned that will serve as a compass for the Partnership Hub's future.

During the start-up phase of the Hub (2020-2022), many transnational and cross-sectoral activities were initiated and delivered thanks to the active engagement of numerous partners. These activities and projects further strengthened and enlarged existing networks, and generated new collaboration opportunities and more support towards the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), which is the Partnership's ultimate aim. In fact, the Hub builds on the shared

vision that the protection goal can only be met if all sectors join forces and collaboratively work together. The importance of these collaborations is further underlined on the occasion of the 14th Trilateral Governmental Conference, themed "Together for ONE Wadden Sea World Heritage".

There are various approaches for cooperation among different sectors and networks, involving a wide range of aims and scopes as well as numerous collaboration options and levels. This is reflected in the different approaches the Partnership Hub offers.

Within this framework, closer working relationships were developed between organisations and single actors involved in joint projects, such as the collaboration between the Wadden Sea Team of Green NGOs, the Wadden Sea Ports, and the Wadden Sea Forum (more on pages 24-25). Building new partnerships for the development of projects and applications for external funding is

one example of collaboration enabled within the Partnership (see box on the KID project). The gathering of stakeholders to exchange and develop knowledge, as done in the TriWadWalk project supported, among others, in the framework of the Partnership Hub (see page 11), is another example of the Partnership's activities. Furthermore, the Partnership Hub supports the connection of different local initiatives and improves their sustainability by connecting them to the trilateral policy level.

The Partnership Hub Administration Unit, associated to the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, provided network coordination and management of the Trilateral Partnership in support of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site and facilitates a multitude of initiatives, such as the Trilateral Dark Sky Initiative (jointly with the Dutch Programme Towards a Rich Wadden Sea). Within the framework of PROWAD Link, the Administration Unit also provided support by informing stakehold-

ers in the Wadden Sea Region about funding opportunities for projects contributing to the protection of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site (see box on the Funding Guide).

What's next?

Many partners collaborated in the Partnership activities and took part in the evaluation process, which was led by an independent consultant in summer 2022. The evaluation represented an important occasion to jointly reflect on the partnership concept and its development, reaffirm the main pillars, and make suggestions for improvement of collaboration within the Partnership.

Key role of collaboration and joint activities

Engaging with diverse stakeholders to forge new ideas and transboundary projects and further unlock funding opportunities to support the OUV of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site remains the ongoing core task within the Partnership. Along this pathway,

active engagement of a wide range of stakeholders will continue to be key for the success of the Partnership and the full achievement of its mission; these stakeholders include the governmental Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC), the scientific community, the Wadden Sea Team of green NGOs, the tourism and education sectors, as well as the Wadden Sea Forum, businesses, and industries. These collaborations will have a crucial role also in the implementation of the SIMP (see pages 36-37).

Scope

The work of the Partnership will revolve around some main themes, including the improvement of the sustainability of key human uses also referred to in the SIMP, which support conservation efforts going beyond the TWSC's main tasks.

Support and coordination

The Trilateral Partnership already involves many stakeholders and deals with a wide range of topics. It is

KID – KEEP IT DARK

The overall objective of the small-scale project **KID** is to develop a **light pollution monitoring network** within the Wadden Sea area that combines different measurement methods to **achieve reliable results**. **Project partners are** the Kapteyn Astronomical Institute of the Univer-

sity of Groningen (lead) and the universities of Aarhus and Oldenburg. The project is carried out within the framework of the **Interreg North Sea Region Programme under Priority 3 “Climate Resilience”, Specific Objective “3.2 Biodiversity, pollution & green infrastructure”**.

**Interreg
North Sea**



Co-funded by
the European Union

KID

expected to involve more sectors and develop even more activities. To support network development and ideas and activities in their incubation phase, adaptive but robust coordination will be needed. The Partnership Hub Administration Unit will continue to be associated to the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat and will be tasked with management and supporting functions in close coordination with a board of signatory representatives that will advise on the future main course of the Partnership.

Resource mobilisation

The Partnership Hub is not a funding mechanism. However, it recognises the crucial need to identify financial resources to support new activities. Therefore, it will provide members with information about the availability of funds and facilitate direct contacts between actors and across borders facilitating the building of project partnerships. 

WADDEN SEA FUNDING GUIDE

To support the development of rough ideas into **full project proposals**, the **Wadden Sea Funding Guide** informs different organisations and actors involved in the Trilateral Partnership about **funding opportunities for projects directly contributing to protection** of the Wadden Sea and sustainable development of the region.

The Guide gives **special attention to five specific themes** which represent

the core of the Trilateral Partnership’s work: **nature conservation; sustainable regional development; international cooperation; education and interpretation; and, governance and Wadden Sea World Heritage brand management**. Based on these themes, the Guide summarises the **most important information and requirements** for some of the major European funding programmes such as **Interreg, Horizon Europe, Life, Eras-**

mus+, and relevant national funding opportunities in the three countries. The Guide was developed within the framework of **PROWAD Link**.



SPOTLIGHT

MAKING WADDEN SEA PORTS GREENER

The Wadden Sea is a unique seascape worth protecting, which has been recognised for its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) by the World Heritage Committee. And the Wadden Sea is an important shipping area. Since 2016, in the Netherlands, the Wadden Sea ports and green NGOs have been working together on making the ports more sustainable. We sat down with Arjen Borsch of Wadden Sea Ports and Marine Perrin of the Wadden Sea Team (WST) to chat about the cooperation. The interview was held by Cristina Nazzari and Khoulood Belhadj.

Welcome both! Arjen, please tell us why is it important for ports to work towards sustainability? How does Wadden Sea World Heritage fit in?

All ports deal with nature protection and nature protection regulations on a daily basis. For the ports located at the Wadden Sea, World Heritage Site nomination constitutes a further challenge, but we also see it as an inspiration for all ports located along the coast to be front runners in terms of sustainability and in the search of nature-friendly solutions.

Marine, what significance do you see in the development of green ports, also regarding the Wadden Sea as a World Heritage Site? And how do NGOs support ports in their development?

Nowadays, ports, as all other economic sectors, are getting more and more conscious of the impact they have on the environment. They take environmental protection more into account while changing their activities towards

more sustainability. In the Wadden Sea area, the development of green ports must include and relate to the protection of the Wadden Sea and its OUV.

It is important that this necessary green transition is carried out by ports together with other stakeholders and the surrounding communities. NGOs can support ports by contributing to raising awareness of the environmen-

tal needs for protection, developing new initiatives, and supporting the ports in speeding up certain processes.

Arjen, you started the cooperation between ports at the Dutch and Trilateral levels. What was your main motivation? Which challenges did you encounter?

I was convinced that cooperation between the Dutch Wadden Sea

Ports could maximise synergies and minimise competition among the ports, following the so-called Blue Ocean Theory. When I started, in 2009-2011, only a few ports were interested in sustainability topics, and it took quite some time and effort for all ports to develop in this direction. Among others, the further development and application of the EcoPort concept has been an important topic of our cooperation. Groningen Seaports, the biggest Dutch Wadden seaport, had a leading role and assisted the other ports in their application procedure. In the certification process, bureaucracy represented a big obstacle that small ports could overcome by joining forces and, finally, they all obtained certification in 2016.

EcoPorts is a European sustainability certificate, which is relevant for all Wadden seaports. The importance of EcoPorts was also taken up in the Tønder Declaration in para. 58. So, we took the initiative to elaborate the

EcoPorts is an environmental initiative of the European port sector. Initiated in 1997 and fully integrated into the European Sea Ports Organisation since 2011, its overarching principle is to raise awareness on environmental protection through cooperation and sharing of knowledge between ports and improve environmental management.

The Agenda for the Wadden Sea Region 2050 describes the policies and management of governments and stakeholders responsible for the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea. National, provincial, and municipal authorities, water authorities, nature conservation organisations, and the private sector were involved. The aim is to achieve a guiding and integrated vision of the future sustainable development of the Wadden Sea region.

The Blue Ocean Strategy is a term to describe the simultaneous pursuit of differentiation and low cost to open up a new market space and create new demand. It is about creating and capturing uncontested market space, thereby making the competition irrelevant.

cooperation with the German and Danish ports. Cooperation started at a topical level. But we realised that sometimes the well-established approach in the Netherlands was not applicable or transferable to other countries. An example is the building-with-nature solutions. An important milestone for the trilateral cooperation of ports was the signing of the Letter of Intent. The document was signed by various ports in the Wadden Sea area and established cooperation on sustainability and environmental topics. The Letter was also presented to the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation at the 13th Trilateral Governmental Conference in Leeuwarden in 2018. Unfortunately, the Wadden seaports of Schleswig Holstein did not join the cooperation.

Now there is also a cooperation between the Wadden Sea ports and environmental NGOs. When and how did you start? How is cooperation evolving?

Arjen: In 2016, in the Netherlands, we had a discussion on sustainable port development and nature protection with the Dutch Waddenacademie. We started a joint project and involved NGOs. Within that project it was decided to develop a common statement between the ports and NGOs. This resulted in the Pact of Marrum, which includes arrangements for a common strategy of port and nature development. Working together had a positive effect on developing better governance of the Dutch Wadden Sea. It also raised political attention, making it easier to apply for additional structural funding, for example from programmes on 'Building with Nature' and 'Green shipping'. Nowadays, all

sorts of projects and programmes are jointly developed by municipalities, provinces, and ministries in the 'Agenda for the Wadden Sea Area'.

Marine: The main objective of the WST here is to achieve closer cooperation between ports and NGOs at the trilateral level, based on learning from the Dutch approach and other initiatives. We are working within the framework of the Partnership Hub and of the activities developed as part of the project "Development of cross-sectoral and cross-stakeholder concepts for sustainable shipping in the trilateral Wadden Sea" funded by the DBU (Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt). Both projects, strongly interlinked, represent the starting point of this cooperation. And we are moving in a good direction. But, of course, it takes time to set up such a process based on dialogue and mutual trust

We would also like to enlarge our cooperation by involving ports and NGOs beyond the current circle. The cooperation we are building also aims to include the shipping sector. However, here it remains more difficult to map and get in contact with the relevant stakeholders. Nevertheless, we want the cooperation to be open to all stakeholders, who desire to exchange and develop common initiatives for sustainable shipping and ports in the Wadden Sea.

Can you tell us a bit more about the trilateral projects and initiatives that you've specifically worked on? How do they support the OUV and/or contribute to sustainable development of the region?

Marine: Our projects aim to develop long-term dialogue and an exchange

platform. An important first step was identifying priority topics to be discussed among shipping stakeholders, ports and NGOs. We identified three dialogue points: shipping safety and environmental practices, light management in ports, and port accessibility, which also includes dredging. Three working groups will be created to enable exchange of information and best practices on these topics, but also to reflect on future common initiatives. The three identified topics directly or indirectly relate to the OUV and generally contribute to sustainable development of the region. Beyond the three topics, the goal is that ports and shipping stakeholders fully consider the OUV and consequently integrate further elements of sustainability into their planning and operations.

What future do you see for this cooperation? What are the next steps? Are there specific topics you are thinking about addressing jointly in near future?

Marine: We have been preparing the first workshops and exchanges on the identified topics. There, we will further analyse the needs and knowledge gaps and decide on concrete next steps and activities. Furthermore, we are working on bringing together seaports and nature conservation organisations and sealing cooperation through the signing of a statement on the occasion of the 14th Trilateral Governmental Conference. This should lay the ground for long-term dialogue and exchange of best practices between signatories. We are eager to develop this cooperation further. 

PROFILES



© Laurens Overtoom

ARJEN BOSCH

Arjen Bosch joined the world of Wadden Sea cooperation in 1996, when he became the head of the Dutch delegation of the former Trilateral Working Group. In 2004, he was appointed Director of Rijkswaterstaat under the Dutch Ministry for Water Management and Infrastructure. In 2008, he initiated a cooperation among the Wadden Sea ports and since then has been acting as Secretary general of the Dutch Wadden seaport cooperation.



© CWSS/ Annika Bostelmann

MARINE PERRIN

Marine Perrin of BUND Lower Saxony acts as coordinator for the NGOs and Ports Project.

The wish to contribute to marine environment protection led her to study sustainable project management and international law of the sea. Through her different experiences (a.o. at CWSS), she learnt the added-value of cross-sectoral and international cooperation for improving the conservation of open cross-border areas such as oceans and seas.

ORIS PARTNERSHIP

INTERGENERATIONAL EXCHANGE AND CLEAN-UP

As part of the partnership between the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS) and Swiss watch manufacturer Oris, two events were held in Lower Saxony in 2022: a beach clean-up took place on Spiekeroog on 12 March and a “Change for the better” event in Harlesiel in August. On Spiekeroog, around 130 people collected 12 cubic metres of litter within three hours. The was organised by Wittbülten National Park House and supported by CWSS in partnership with Oris, the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI), as well as the Wadden Sea sailing associations Soltwaters e.V. and Wadvaarders.

For the annual main event of the partnership in summer, Oris sponsored the children’s WattenMeer-Camp 2022, organised by grün&bunt.

The following weekend, 30 invited guests of Oris dived into the topic of Wadden Sea World Heritage, guided by CWSS and Waddensea.travel, and were introduced to the camp’s group of 25 children, aged eight to eleven. “Protection will soon be in the hands of today’s children. Oris aims to inspire the next generation in conservation by supporting opportunities like the WattenMeerCamp,” said Sven Mostögl from Oris.

After the children’s appeal to protect this special habitat and preserve it for the next generation, the guests spent the weekend exploring and learning more about the Wadden Sea and its region. During a litter collection activity, the participants filled some 40 glasses with thrown-away cigarette butts. “Carelessly discarded cigarette butts are a massive problem,” says

Bernard Baerends, CWSS Executive Secretary. “Nicotine is washed out and ends up in lakes and rivers, and plastic filters may break down into micro-plastics. The butts are a problem for humans, animals, and plants.”

The CWSS-Oris partnership was launched in May 2021 with the release of the “Dat Watt” watch dedicated to the site and belonging to a series of watches produced by Oris with the aim of celebrating earth’s marine heritage while highlighting the importance of the conservation of the oceans. Parts of the proceeds from the watch’s sale will also go towards supporting the International Wadden Sea School. Another event is planned in 2023 in Denmark. 



Collectors handing over their goods © Andreas Klesse

WADDEN SEA DAY

UNDERSTANDING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SPECIES

Given the importance of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site for global diversity, it is vital to study the relationships between species in the food web, to consider them in their entirety and to understand how human activities change these relationships and the functionality of the entire ecosystem. All species are interlinked by their need to find enough food. If one species is declining or missing, others relying on this species for food may suffer as well, with possible consequences for the entire Wadden Sea ecosystem. Thus, we need to know “Who eats whom” to effectively manage the site as one ecological entity. 100 policymakers, conservation managers, scientists, and partners from non-governmental organizations discussed this question at this year’s Wadden Sea Day, held on 25 August in Wilhelmshaven.

Keynote speaker Dr Nathalie Niquil of the French National Centre for Scientific Research presented her work on food webs at the French coast. “Climate change, in particular through rising temperatures, is putting undeniable pressure on our biodiversity”, said Niquil. “The effects can be seen in changes in the distribution of species as well as in changes in processes, such as photosynthesis or species growth, resulting in a change in the functioning of ecosystems. Studying food webs, i.e. the network of exchanges between prey and predator, makes it possible to research how these effects combine with other pressure factors linked to human activities, such as fishing, pollution, or modification of marine habitats.”

Dr Sabine Horn of the Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar

and Marine Research summed up the regional perspective with her keynote speech. “The Wadden Sea food web is a complex system providing goods and services to humanity. Impacts such as rising temperature, introduced species, and habitat degradation cause severe changes in its structure and functioning.”, said Horn.

Overall, nine presentations provided insights on these trophic levels of the Wadden Sea food web, from primary production to top predators. The day concluded with a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Agreement on the Conservation of Seals in the Wadden Sea. 

“Climate change, in particular through rising temperatures, is putting undeniable pressure on our biodiversity”



Speakers of the Wadden Sea Day © Annika Bostelmann



40TH ANNIVERSARY OF JOINT DECLARATION

LOOKING BACK AND AHEAD

“25 years ago, the Wadden Sea countries saw the potential of a trilateral and transboundary plan for management of the largest unbroken intertidal flats system in the world”



In Copenhagen on 9 December 1982, 40 years ago, three ministers of Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands put their signatures on the very first Joint Declaration on the protection of the Wadden Sea. The document encompassed but two pages and consisted of a preamble as well as two points of intention: to consult each

other in order to coordinate activities and measures, in particular regarding seals and waterfowl, and to intensify and broaden the contact between the responsible administrations; intentions that form the basis of the Trilateral Cooperation on the Protection of the Wadden Sea to date. Since the Copenhagen Conference, the Trilateral

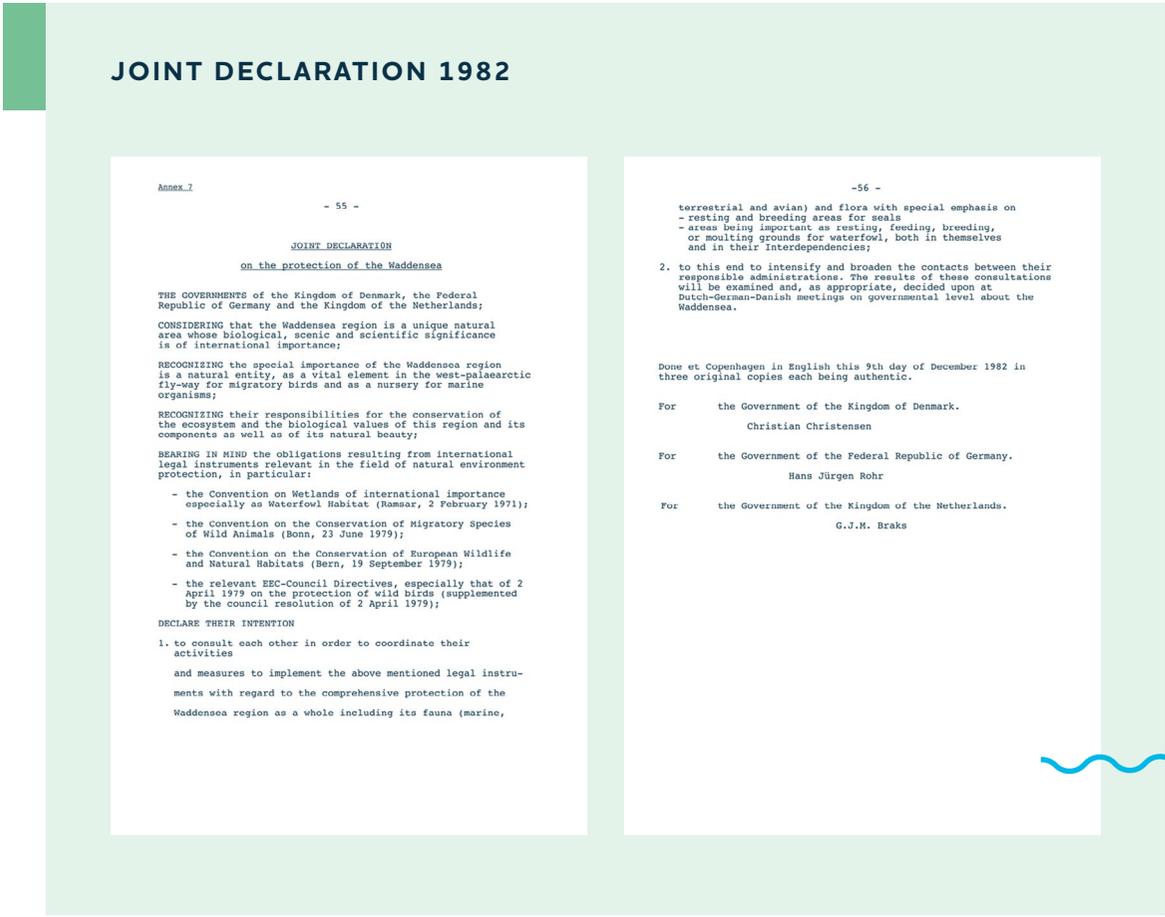
Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC) has grown into an internationally recognised, institutionalised, multi-faceted, and vibrant network of hundreds of Wadden Sea enthusiasts. How did we get here and, more importantly, where are we going now? This article reflects on those questions by following the various anniversaries of 2022.

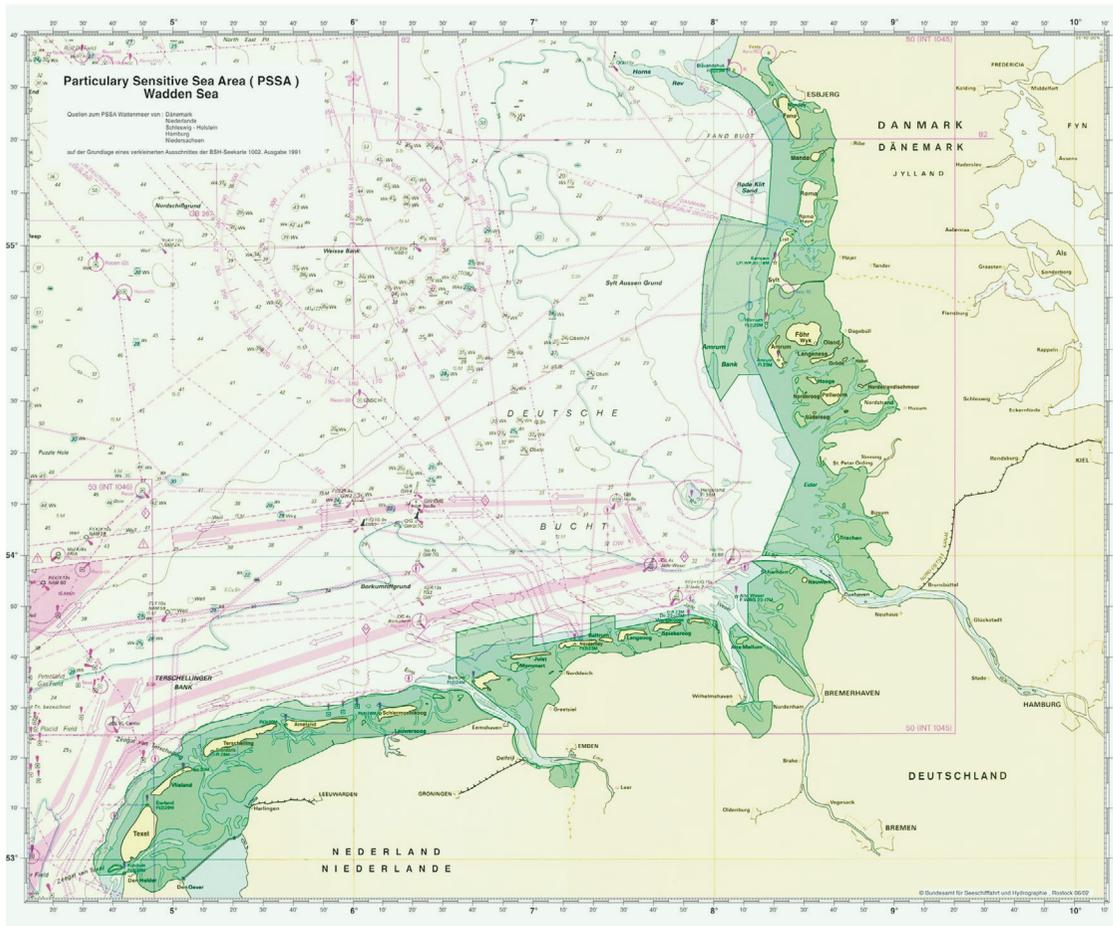
Headquarters of the Cooperation
 With the foundation of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS) in 1987, 35 years ago, an institutionalised structure began to form. A team of two has since grown to a team of nine. The total size of the team, including three people employed on a project basis and two interns, reflects the sheer growth of topics and intentions in just a few decades. To name just one, in 1991, CWSS became its secretariat of the Agreement on the Conservation of Seals in the Wadden Sea (WSSA). The agreement was the first international, legally binding agreement under the auspices of the UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. The TWSC's aim with the agreement was to achieve and maintain favourable conservation status for the Wadden Sea harbour seal population through close collaboration in research and monitoring, as well as by increasing public awareness as an integral part of this ecosystem. For the three Wadden Sea countries, the agreement has had impacts that can be seen in management changes, which have been adopted based on the results of the trilaterally agreed monitoring carried out regularly which reflects and supports the continued success of the WSSA. It also served as the umbrella for coordinated actions taken during the seals pandemics.

adopted at the 8th Trilateral Governmental Conference in Stade in 1997, later revised in 2010. Since then, it has served as the policy and management plan for the Wadden Sea's natural and cultural heritage. Through its trilateral targets and policies, it aims to mirror the shared vision of harbouring biological diversity in the area and sustaining it for generations to come. To this day, the Wadden Sea Plan is driven by a well-grounded vision of a mutually invested community that works actively and efficiently on sustaining ecological veracity and resilience.

Monitoring foundation with TMAP
 At the Stade Conference of 1997, the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme (TMAP) was also brought to life, one of the cornerstones of the Trilateral Cooperation on the protection of the Wadden Sea. TMAP is the joint monitoring programme of the Wadden Sea countries. The programme spans a broad range of topics, such as morphology, ecological processes, wildlife, and human activities, and covers the entire Wadden Sea Area, including islands and offshore areas. The vision of TMAP is a harmonised and effective monitoring and assessment programme, based on sound scientific evidence, which serves the needs of policy making at all levels, the commitments ensuing from relevant EU legislation and instruments of international law, as well as World Heritage status and which supports management of the Wadden Sea as an ecological entity. The findings collected through TMAP contribute to the assessment reports under the umbrella of the Wadden Sea Quality Status Report, which was first published on printed paper in 1991, and has by now made its

Management foundation with Wadden Sea Plan
 25 years ago, the Wadden Sea countries saw the potential of a trilateral and transboundary plan for management of the largest unbroken intertidal flats system in the world. The Trilateral Wadden Sea Plan was





way to an online platform, qsr.wadden-sea-worldheritage.org, accessible to all.

First Particularly Sensitive Sea Area in Europe

20 years ago, on 11 October 2002, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) designated the Wadden

Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), following the application of Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, making it the fifth selected PSSA globally and the first based on a joint application by three countries as well as in Europe. The PSSA designation serves as a signal to

the international shipping community to recognise the sensitivity of the area to shipping risks and paves the way for further protection and sustainable use of the area. It recognizes the Wadden Sea's socio-economic, ecological, and scientific significance as an outstanding natural site of global importance.

Flying beyond Wadden Sea borders

10 years ago, in 2012, the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative (WSFI) was founded by Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands in recognition of the responsibility arising from the Wadden Sea being a key stopover site for migratory waterbirds along the East Atlantic Flyway and stimulated by UNESCO World Heritage inscription. In close cooperation with local, regional, and international partners, the initiative participates in global efforts to strengthen the conservation of migratory waterbirds. This is done through a monitoring and a capacity building and management programme. In 2020, the international network of site managers successfully conducted the third flyway-wide count of migratory waterbirds.

Full plate of topics

These are just a few on a long list of significant milestones the TWSC has reached over the past four decades. The milestones have also opened the doors to new fields, addressed in the revision of the Joint Declaration in 2010, when, instead of two intentions, 14 were formulated, regarding the geographical area, guiding principle and vision, objectives, areas, and institutional and financial arrangements of the TWSC. With the extension of the designation of the Wadden Sea as a World Heritage Site in 2014, new topics were added to the TWSC's portfolio, such as sustainable tourism, but also global recognition of the TWSC and CWSS as competent and pioneering partners and CWSS as a central contact for the UNESCO Wadden Sea World Heritage Site.

Due to the increase of scope, as well as challenges (the climate crisis

being the most prominent) during the 2018–2022 term of the TWSC, the three countries, coordinated by CWSS, developed a single integrated management plan, accumulating all the different topics, threats, groups, and networks in one umbrella document. The single integrated management plan will serve as a means to further embrace and improve coordinated cooperation efforts on a local, regional, and trilateral scale after its adoption at the 14th Trilateral Governmental Conference in Wilhelmshaven.

Yet, we are still on the journey to doing much more and this stems from the duty and obligation to conserve the Wadden Sea as a World Heritage Site. A new phase of a multi-stakeholder, transboundary partnership commenced where shared visions, ideas, and competencies collided under the roof of a Trilateral Partnership Hub. Amidst a time of change, where cooperation and awareness have become more important and necessary than ever, CWSS continues to consolidate the foundation of a shared Wadden Sea by all means, including through exchange, joint projects, environmental education, awareness building, and communication. 

ANNIVERSARY

FIVE DECADES OF WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

ANNIVERSARY

WADDEN SEA FORUM TURNED 20



Founded with the aim to represent the greatest natural and cultural treasures of humanity, 50 years later, UNESCO's World Heritage Convention remains a major international instrument for safeguarding World Heritage.

The Convention was developed in 1972 from the merging of the preservation of cultural sites with the conservation of nature movements. Its most significant feature is that it links the concepts of nature conservation and the preservation of cultural properties in a single document. The Convention helps preserve UNESCO World Heritage, natural and cultural, with a list of over 1150 irreplaceable assets of humanity, located in more than 160 countries, of which 897 are cultural, 218 are natural, and 39 are

mixed properties. It constitutes a provision for international and collective protection of natural and heritage with outstanding universal value.

Today, the Convention faces many changes, with increasing threats to UNESCO World Heritage Sites through extreme weather events, conflict, pandemic, and the climate crisis affecting people and their heritage. In order to continue to ensure protection of these assets, implementing the Convention has become more important than ever.

For its globally unique geological and ecological values, the Wadden Sea has been on the list of World Heritage Sites since 2009. It continues to be a priority for integrated protection and conservation to sustain for generations to come. 

The Forum of the Wadden Sea Region, or Wadden Sea Forum (WSF), celebrated its 20th anniversary during its 42nd plenary meeting, which took place on 28-29 September in Wilhelmshaven.

The Forum is an independent multi-stakeholder, multi-actor platform from Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, with representatives of the sectors of agriculture, energy, fisheries, industry and harbour, nature protection, and tourism, as well as local and regional governments. National governments are represented as observers. The WSF was established in 2002, following a decision by the 9th Trilateral Governmental Conference, with the aim of contributing to an advanced

and sustainable development. To this day, the Forum and the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation are strongly interlinked. For instance, representatives of the WSF are advisors to the Wadden Sea Board.

"Since its foundation 20 years ago, the Wadden Sea Forum has grown into one of our main strategies partners", says CWSS Executive Secretary Bernard Baerends. "Without it, we would not have a network of stakeholders we can address and we were pleased the Forum was one of the first partners to join our common Partnership Hub. Looking at the portfolio of the WSF, I am convinced the WSF will proceed successfully and I wish the WSF all the best for the next 20 years!". 

INTERVIEW

“WE DON’T PROTECT NATURE JUST FOR NATURE, BUT ALSO FOR PEOPLE”



Karin Lochte © G. Born

With the 14th Trilateral Governmental Conference, Prof. Dr Karin Lochte's term as Chair of the Wadden Sea Board (WSB), the steering body of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC), comes to an end after four years. Some reflections. The interview was conducted by Khoulood Belhadj.

Looking back at the past 4 years, what topics and priorities defined your chair's term?

My main priorities aligned with those of the German presidency. The biggest emphasis was on the development of the single integrated management plan, SIMP. Other major topics were the Partnership Hub and the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme, with data issues at the forefront. Coming from the science sector, it was my personal goal to bring science and management closer together. I am very happy that we managed to push this aim forward and include science in the TWSC. I hope the connection will grow.

What moments of your chairmanship are you most proud of?

I enjoyed those moments when meetings led to concrete decisions; when we have just taken a step forward. It was a joint achievement for all of us and a satisfying moment for me, especially because not all meetings were like that.

I am particularly proud of the success of the SIMP. It was something we made really good progress with and a major step forward, thanks to Soledad Luna pushing us. I hope it will be a guiding framework for the work of the next four years.

I am also very proud of setting up the Trilateral Programming Committee for Wadden Sea Research under the guidance of Bernd Scherer. I am really happy that we now have this group with all three countries well represented. We still have a few more steps ahead, but this is a great start.

What challenges did you not expect to come across?

I did not expect some processes to take this long. I did anticipate the several rounds of consultation with the three countries, all having different priorities and opinions. I knew that as Chair I would have to moderate

between them. However, often, also because of certain requirements and administrative difficulties, I found myself going beyond moderation and into bilateral talks to push issues forward. An example of this is the work on data exchange. A lot of groundwork was needed and done in the past years, but I have to say that the breakthrough is still ahead of us.

Coming in the position from outside the TWSC, you had to rely to quite a certain extent on the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS). Do you have any reflections on the organisational setting?

I think the Secretariat is the heart and soul of the Wadden Sea work. I experienced CWSS as great support for the Chair and as absolutely essential for the TWSC groups. The team does excellent work and, without it, we wouldn't have proceeded forward as much. I am concerned, however, that the amount of tasks exceeds the capacity of CWSS's current size. We are not really achieving all that we want to achieve due to limited staff capacities. I am aware that it relates to limited funding, but this is an issue that needs more recognition as a limiting factor.

CWSS makes the best of what is given and its work is excellent, meticulous, and conscientious. Even during the pandemic, a very challenging period, the Secretariat maintained good communication. The highlight was managing the short-term switch of the ISWSS from an in-person to an online meeting. A masterpiece.

Another wish of mine is for CWSS to get more international staff. I believe that we could benefit from more innovative and creative thoughts looking for international minds, master's students for example. For instance, how wonderful is it to have Khoulood here as an intern leading our interview?

Appointed as independent chair, do you have any recommendations for your successor?

I wish her much success, luck, and joy. I deem the biggest asset to be impartial. Listen to and understand all three countries and their conditions to avoid prioritising one side over the other. This is something I needed to learn and I realise that my start was easier coming from the outside. I also

Karin Lochte at a Wadden Sea Board meeting in Copenhagen in 2018 © Wilfred Gachau



recommend trying to keep an eye on the future and anticipate what may happen. The WSB is so busy with daily business that we often don't have time to look further ahead. I imagine that an occasional retreat that includes young people might give the necessary space to evaluate the WSB's procedures and topics and ask whether we are still on the right track.

To your understanding, what are the major challenges for the Trilateral Cooperation in the next 4 and next 50 years?

The climate crisis is the biggest challenge for the Wadden Sea itself and

“Coming from the science sector, it was my personal goal to bring science and management closer together”



therefore for the TWSC. We are not yet well enough prepared. At the moment we are still very complacent, but this will end soon. At the Board, we should keep the focus on the climate crisis amidst the current energy crisis leading to an economic crisis, which in turn will lead to a shift of priorities in society. Sooner rather than later we will all have to answer how much we are willing to give to save the environment while people are suffering at the same time. In that setting, nature may not receive the attention it really needs. It is essential to keep reminding people and politicians how important it is to protect the environment. If

we risk the environment to surpass short-term issues, we may aggravate them even more. And, without a healthy environment, there are no healthy people. This is also true for the Wadden Sea.

I am aware that this sounds quite gloomy, but I also see opportunity: people change best in the face of danger. We can take this chance and truly alter our ways. 

REPORT UPDATE

SEVERAL NEW THEMATIC REPORTS ON QSR PLATFORM

The Wadden Sea Quality Status Report (QSR) is a conglomeration of thematic reports reflecting the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the ecological status of the Wadden Sea, including islands and offshore areas. The compiled information traditionally feeds into the international Scientific Wadden Sea Symposia (ISWSS) and the Trilateral Governmental Conferences (TGC). In 2017, the QSR was upgraded from a PDF file to the widely accessible online portal qsr.waddensea-worldheritage.org, with the aim of integrating updates to the thematic reports directly into the platform. Now, nine thematic reports received complete updates, displaying assessments on birds, marine mammals, alien species, and fish populations, as well as on subtidal habitats, energy, and tourism. "The Quality Status Report is not a straight-forward publication", says Sascha Klöpfer, CWSS Deputy Executive Secretary and QSR coordinator. "The thematic reports are products of altogether over 100 experts from the Wadden Sea region and beyond.

Each report is written by a handful of experts and peer-reviewed by an editorial board. A lengthy but essential process to get a viable review of Wadden Sea data, which we are very proud of in the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation." The reports analyse trends and the direction of change as well as long-term trends while considering shifting environmental factors, pressures, and human activities.

Breeding Birds

Breeding bird populations in the Wadden Sea still show considerable downward trends, with 18 out of 33 species (55%) having experienced significant declines. The offspring rates, being the basis to maintain a stable population, have been negatively affected by increased predation risk, flooding, disturbance, and food availability.

Migratory Birds

Long-term trends in migratory birds over the last 33 years are still of concern. Besides the unchanging numbers of 14 species (comprising worm, benthic, and invertebrate feeders), an increase in



the number of 7 species (including Fish and plant-eating species) has been re-recorded. However, 13 species witnessed a decline, including shellfish feeders.

(East Atlantic) Flyway

Most flyway species show stable or increasing population trends, except for Arctic breeding and long-distance migratory waders, which are decreasing. The decline is a result of the negative effects of fishing, disturbance by tourism, agricultural use, and interference from human constructions. Also, the effects of climate change are more frequently mentioned than in the past with negative impacts, especially on populations breeding in the Arctic where warming is recorded as more rapid compared to temperate regions.

Fish

Status and trends of Wadden Sea fish in the past decade revealed a total of 124 different species, with varying trends in abundance. This variation concerns the different ecological guilds, e.g. marine juveniles, estuarine residents, and species migrating between fresh and marine waters (diadromous). The nursery function of the Wadden Sea appears to have declined since the 1980s, but has stabilised during the last decade. The Wadden Sea may be an important (nursery) area for elasmobranch species (skates and sharks), based on anecdotal information as this is not covered by monitoring programmes.

Marine Mammals

As iconic species, but also as top predators, harbour seals, grey seals, and harbour porpoises within the Wadden Sea Area are sentinels for ecosystem health. The integrated assessment of harbour

porpoises within the marine mammals' report shows overall downward numbers, as opposed to harbour and grey seal populations which increased. Marine mammals in the North Sea face a wide range of threats, such as underwater noise, fishing, and pollution (contaminants and litter) which can affect their health and influence their distribution.

Alien Species

As a compilation of all detected alien species in the Wadden Sea, the trilateral alien species list encompasses 113 marine species. The alien species assessment report reveals the addition of 20 species to the trilateral alien species list in the past decade, which is almost a doubling of the introduction rate compared to the former period starting in 1990. Most of these marine alien taxa originate from the Pacific or from the Atlantic. Major introduction vectors are transoceanic shipping and aquaculture; intentional or unintentional introduction is the most important pathway for terrestrial plants. Although the introduced species have not caused the extinction of native species in the Wadden Sea so far, some alien species have the potential to alter dominance structures, habitats, and trophic regimes, which are fundamental for the ecosystem.

Subtidal habitats

Subtidal habitats are the deeper parts of the Wadden Sea, which are submerged more than 96% of the time and constitute a total share of 44% of the overall area of the trilateral Wadden Sea. The assessment of habitats and species composition and their variability over space and time is the subject of ongoing research. For a better understanding of the functioning of the trilateral subtidal Wadden Sea, much can be gained from

TRILATERAL MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME

The Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme, or TMAP, is the joint monitoring programme of the Wadden Sea countries and backbone to the Quality Status Report. Launched 25 years ago in 1997, the programme spans a broad range of topics, such as morphology, ecological processes, wildlife, and human activities. TMAP covers the entire Wadden Sea Area, including islands and offshore areas. The vision of TMAP is a harmonised and effective monitoring and assessment programme, based on sound scientific evidence, which serves the needs of policy making at all levels, the commitments ensuing from relevant EU legislation and instruments of international law, as well as the World Heritage status and that supports the management of the Wadden Sea as an ecological entity.

combining best practices of species sampling campaigns and hydroacoustic surveys from individual countries. If combined in a trilateral survey, this information could lead to extended knowledge of the subtidal Wadden Sea. The effort and methodology of mapping the subtidal zone were differently pronounced in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands. Generally, the activities show an increase in quality and quantity over the last six years.

Energy

Fossil and renewable energy production take place in proximity to or within the Wadden Sea. The development of offshore wind energy in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark has been rapid in recent decades and will even speed up in this decade. Although the Wadden Sea conservation area is exempt from wind farm development, the grid connections and interconnectors traverse

the Wadden Sea, thus affecting the area directly. Although the expansion of regenerative energy is necessary to combat climate change, all types of energy production can also have effects on the environment. Impacts are construction-related, operational, or plant-specific. All forms of energy production cause an increase in ship and aerial traffic due to the construction and maintenance of facilities, with scarce effects for birds and marine mammals and an increased risk of accidents.

Tourism

Throughout the region, tourism is a well-developed economic sector and thus a major pillar for socio-economic development. Revenues are created to contribute to economic stability as well as a positive attitude towards nature conservation, given that outstanding and intact nature is understood to be the region's

main competitive factor. Balancing the positive and negative impacts of tourism, with the aim of maximising the former and minimising the latter, is a key task for tourism managers. One of the main challenges lies in the collection and communication of up-to-date, consistent, and comparable data across the three countries of the trilateral Wadden Sea region.



Lesser spotted dogfish © Oscar Bos

THE SIMP

INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR ONE WADDEN SEA WORLD HERITAGE

The Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation, with the Wadden Sea Plan (2010) at its backbone, operates to conduct a shared policy and management strategy for the protection and sustainable management of the area, with the imperative of safeguarding its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). This aspect of trilateral cooperation is reinforced by “The SIMP - Integrated Management Plan for ONE Wadden Sea World Heritage”, which functions as an umbrella plan to serve as a guide for all aspects of the transnational Wadden Sea World Heritage Site and complements the Wadden Sea Plan (2010), which contains the trilaterally agreed targets and policies. With the development of the SIMP, the Trilateral Governmental Cooperation on the protection of the Wadden Sea

(TWSC) follows the official request made by UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee in 2014.

The SIMP demonstrates the nature conservation structures in the three countries and their trilateral joint efforts. As a non-binding political agreement, and under the roof of trilateral dialogue, the SIMP operates with the purpose of exploring common grounds and improving coherence in transboundary management tasks and activities for the OUV’s protection and maintenance. “As each Wadden Sea country represents a different contribution to cooperation, with the plan, we seek to acknowledge and use the combined capabilities of the three parties to collectively respond to common relevant issues and continue the long-term protection of the Wad-

den Sea,” says Dr Soledad Luna, SIMP Programme Officer at the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat.

Fulfilling the SIMP calls for coordinated dialogue, research, and a deep understanding of the responsibility of maintaining the Wadden Sea for its global importance. Working towards common nature conservation goals, the SIMP is important for the enhancement of the exchange of good practices, knowledge, and experience between site managers through joint activities and efforts to expand the scope of cooperation at different levels. By establishing a valuable framework for strategic communication and cooperation via the implementation of the SIMP, trilateral groups, as well as site managers, policymakers, relevant institutions, and stakeholders, can identify and address

existing and future issues as well as establish greater cohesion.

The plan was developed in an iterative and participatory way in the TWSC, including policy and nature conservation site management levels transnationally. The Task Group World Heritage oversaw the overall process of development of the SIMP, including the participation of TWSC groups, site managers, and experts. Consultation was also received beyond the TWSC structure: external stakeholders and members of advisory boards in each of the German Federal States, Denmark, and the Netherlands reviewed and commented on the draft SIMP, as well as the Wadden Sea Forum of stakeholders, the Wadden Sea Team of environmental NGOs at the trilateral level.

“These rounds of consultation with diverse partners really improved the plan’s ambition level, readability, and clarity, for which we are immensely thankful”, says Barbara Engels, chair of the Task Group World Heritage.

The SIMP will be revised regularly by the Wadden Sea Board (WSB) to keep its operational nature up-to-date. A progress report every four years prior to the Ministerial Declaration and a review cycle of 10-12 years are foreseen. The four-year report gathers the progress made trilaterally and by each country in implementing the SIMP activities. The 10-12 year review presents an opportunity to adapt the SIMP to the management requirements of the TWSC, including the selection of key topics, with the support and participation of all parties

involved in implementing the plan. The identification of common objectives, risks, and challenges makes national efforts more closely aligned and coherent. Five key topics lie at the heart of the SIMP: fisheries; tourism; shipping and ports; renewable energy and energy from oil and gas; and, coastal flood defence and protection. "The SIMP recognises these as im-

portant socio-economic factors in the region for their contribution to preserving jobs, ensuring food security, providing erosion and coastal flooding protection, supporting maritime trade and transport, and providing energy. However, when interlinked, pressures from the key topics and climate change can come with an altering cost for the environment, despite existing

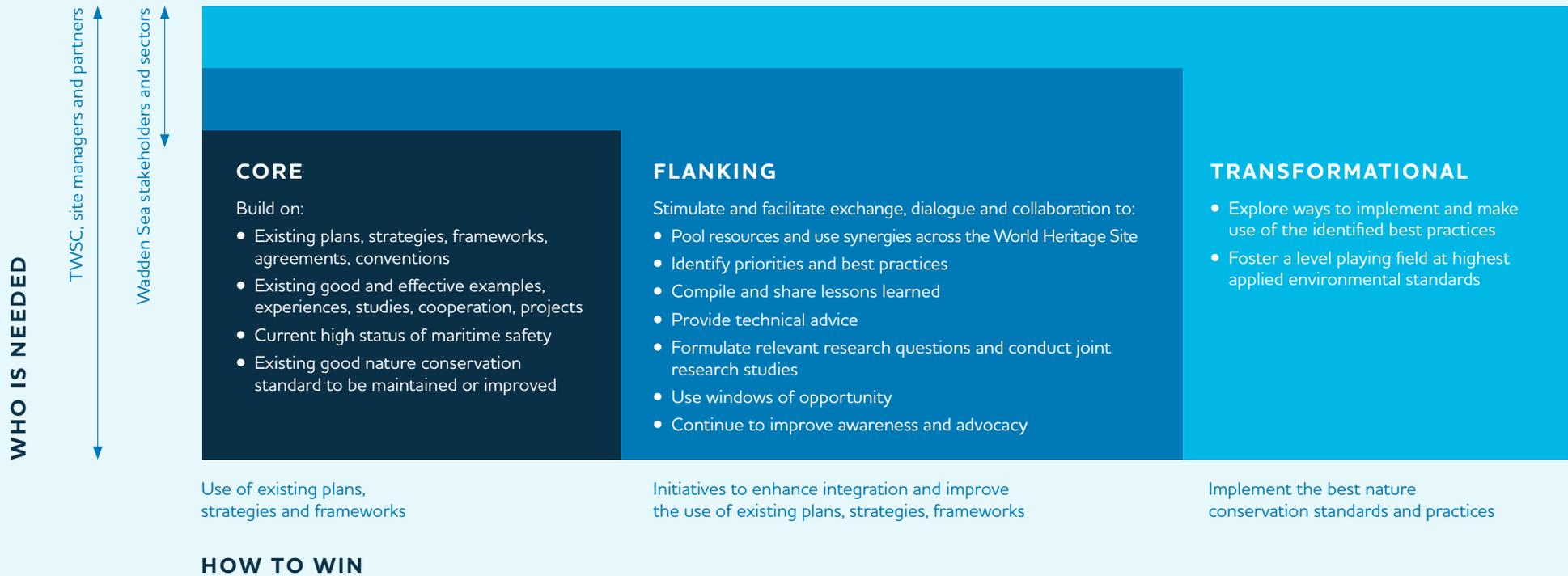
regulatory protection regimes. The key topic activities on dialogue set the conditions that call for more effective employment of joint management tasks and activities through cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Set in the context of interdisciplinary cross-sectoral exchange, the key topics' activities are grounded on

the trilateral exchange of knowledge and best practices, awareness raising, and advocacy. An important aspect of this exchange is to expose and thus propagate existing good nature conservation standards and practices. The trilateral identification of best practices helps build on and improve the use of existing plans, strategies, and frameworks, which makes con-

servation efforts more closely aligned and coherent. Awareness building and advocacy will generate further support for activities in favour of enhancing and maintaining the OUV of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site. 

SIMP AMBITION LEVELS



HARBOUR AND GREY SEALS

NEW PLAN AIDS MANAGEMENT OF SEAL POPULATIONS

The status of the Wadden Sea's seal populations had been of great concern in the past century as well as during the epidemics in the early 2000s. Fortunately, developments over recent decades have been rather positive. Grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) numbers have continued to grow, with almost 9,000 counted in 2022. Harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*) numbers, after a long period of population growth, are now fluctuating at around 27,000 counted individuals.

However, these charismatic marine mammals continue to face threats, old and new. Human activities within the Wadden Sea and beyond are increasing, such as shipping, fisheries, pollution, or the construction of wind farms. A better understanding of how these activities affect seal populations

and how any negative impacts may be mitigated has yet to be gained. Thus, protection efforts continue to be needed and the 30-year-old Wadden Sea Seal Agreement remains highly significant.

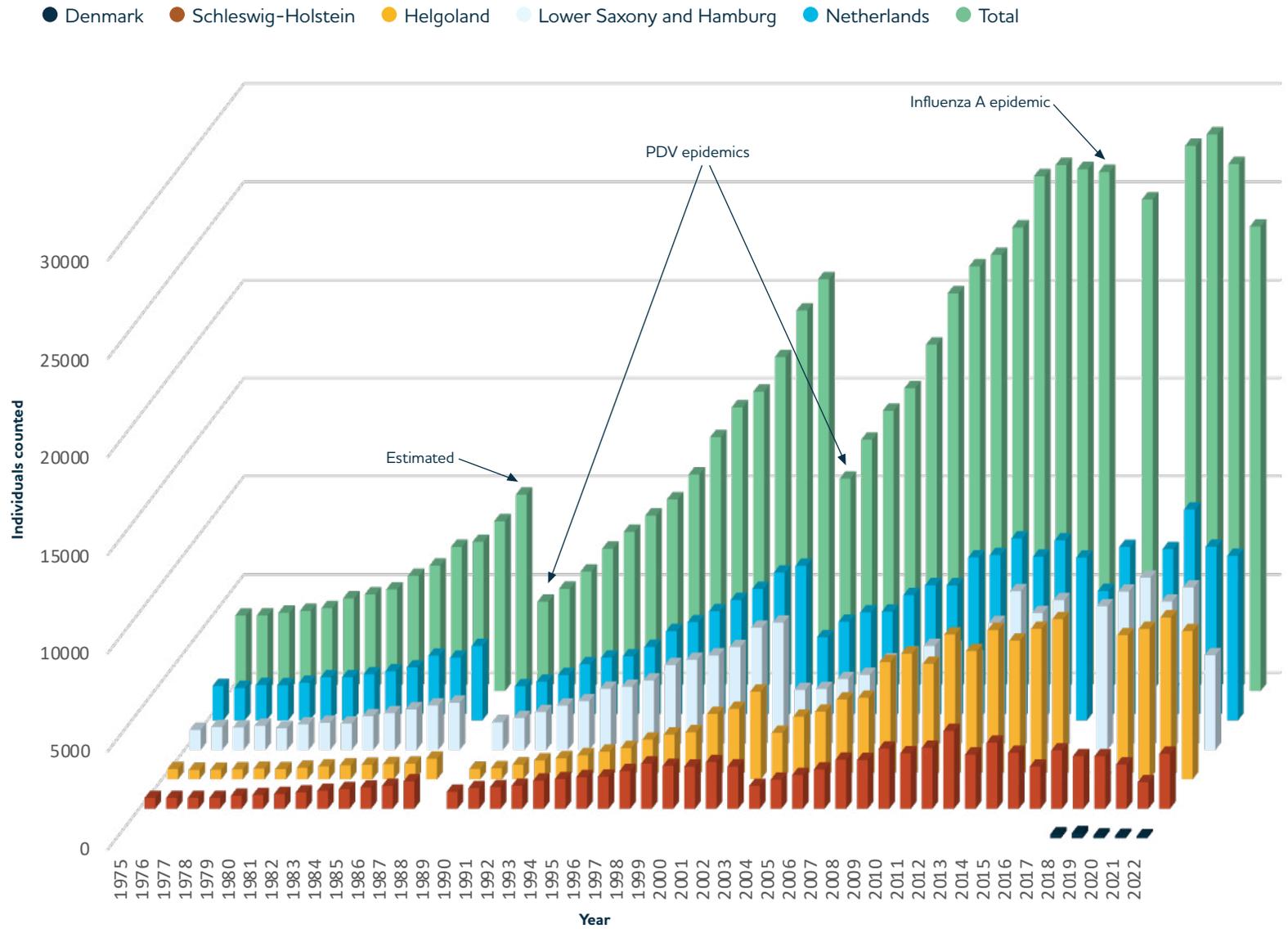
Set in the framework of the Agreement, the Seals Management Plan (SMP) contains a comprehensive set of target actions for the effective management of the seal populations. These target actions range from the monitoring of the seals to research needed for the development of adequate management measures for the protection of key habitats, the taking of seals and awareness-raising activities. In 2022 the plan was renewed for the period of 2023-2027, largely as a continuation of previous efforts, with many management issues ongoing.

Discussions during the development of the new plan revealed that understanding the impact of offshore wind farms will have to be a key focus of the SMP in the coming years. Increased air and shipping traffic in the Wadden Sea, resulting in underwater noise, may have negative effects as well as a potential impact on foraging grounds of the Wadden Sea seal populations in the North Sea.

Another key issue that needs further attention is the discrepancy between the continued increase in recorded harbour seal pups born each year and the fluctuating number of individuals counted during moult. This could, for example, be a reflection of increased juvenile mortality or higher dispersion. For effective management of the harbour seal population, this trend needs to be better understood. 

Harbour seals on land © TTF, Fisheries and Maritime Museum, Esbjerg





Total number of harbour seals counted in the Wadden Sea during the moult in August, as well as numbers for each region, from 1975 to 2022. In 2016 and 2018, parts of the Wadden Sea could not be surveyed on the coordinated date, resulting in missing total counts for these years. Since 2018, data from Helgoland are included.

SWIMWAY INITIATIVE

FISH IN THE WADDEN SEA – PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

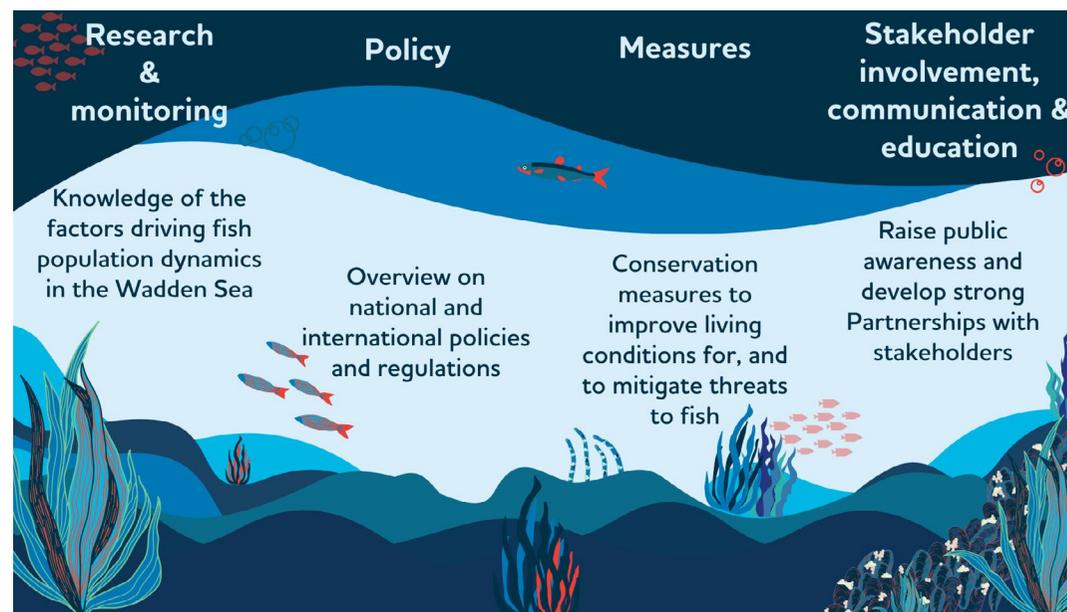
The SWIMWAY Wadden Sea approach is an umbrella for a wide variety of activities related to achieving the fish targets of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC). Its trilateral Wadden Sea SWIMWAY Vision and Action Programme (2019-2024) describes actions suitable to improve knowledge of relevant processes, optimise population monitoring, adjust policies and develop, implement and evaluate measures towards reaching the targets. The main benefit will be the identification of population bottlenecks and the translation of this knowledge into effective management and conservation measures. Closing these knowledge gaps will help to improve effective conservation.

The year 2022 marks the first half of the trilateral Wadden Sea SWIMWAY

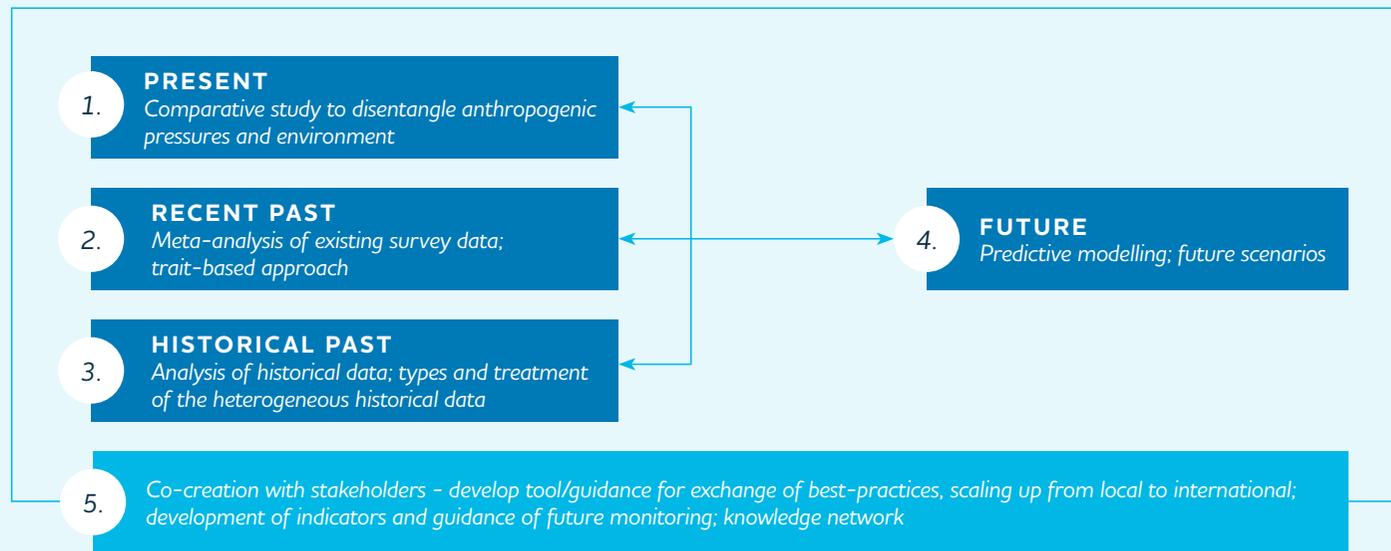
Vision and Action Programme – time for a midterm review, which was drafted by Adi Kellermann, Chair of the trilateral Expert Group Swimway (EG-Swimway). After the milestone achievement of the international scientific conference “SWIMWAYS: Understanding connectivity within the life cycles of coastal fish” in 2019, there have been some exciting activities in 2022: amongst these is a proposal for a Wadden Sea fish monitoring programme under the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme (TMAP) and work towards interconnectivity.

Further, following a modular approach for a trilateral fish project centred around the past, present, and future, first steps on the historical perspective were taken with a trilateral project “Systematic review for historical

PILLARS OF THE SWIMWAY VISION AND ACTION PROGRAMME



COMPONENTS FOR TRILATERAL FISH PROJECT PROPOSAL



reconstruction of the Wadden Sea fish assemblage – SWIMWAY historical reference” (SHIRE), funded by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) (January –October 2022). In the first half of 2022, a team of experts and students from DTU Aqua and Roskilde University (Denmark), the University of Kiel (Germany), Groningen University (Netherlands), and the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS) worked on reconstruction of the historical fish assemblage of the Wadden Sea. The results give a glimpse into the occurrence of fish species from as far back

as 1500, when many of the records were from fishermen and fisheries statistics. Through data extraction, the historical occurrence of 144 fish species was established, with observed abundances for many of the species.

This project was a first step to accessing historical data and has already shown some promising results as far as identifying potential shifts in the fish assemblage of the Wadden Sea. Moreover, the systematic review has succeeded in identifying a host of potential sources which could still be consulted for future work. The

knowledge gained helps not only the implementation of the trilateral Wadden Sea Swimway Vision and Action Programme, but may also serve as a starting point for the integration of additional sources to complete the assessment, potentially within a larger project.

In the second half of the SWIMWAY Vision and Action Programme, further steps are planned towards a trilateral fish project – among them following up on the idea of setting up a Graduate school. Also, following up on the successful SWIMWAY conference in

“There should be no human-induced bottlenecks in the Wadden Sea for fish populations or their ecosystem functions (Tulp et al, 2017)”



2019, it is planned to hold a second SWIMWAY conference in 2024, with a joint effort with several ongoing national fish projects, e.g., the Dutch Waddentools and the Make Room for Fish migration project (Ruim Baan voor Vissen).

Would you be interested in joining in with ideas for a joint trilateral project on fish in the Wadden Sea and beyond, or be part of a possible future Graduate school? Please contact us at info@waddensea-secretariat.org 

GLOBAL UNESCO PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL DNA SAMPLED IN WADDEN SEA

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Paris is conducting a global citizen science initiative on environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling in marine UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The 50 Sites form a network of worldwide importance for the protection of biodiversity. The Wadden Sea World Heritage Site was selected as one of the pilot regions in the eDNA expedition project (www.unesco.org/en/edna-expeditions) and was the first of 25 Sites to do the sampling. From 22–26 September 2022, samples were collected at five different locations along the Wadden Sea coast, coordinated by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS).

Ocean species shed DNA into the water around them. The genetic material from waste, mucus, or cells in one litre of water can determine the species richness in a given area, without the need to extract organisms from their environment. The cost-effective, ethical nature of eDNA sampling has the potential to revolutionise knowledge about ecosystems and species diversity and to inspire the next generation of ocean researchers.

By collecting samples, the project helps measure marine biodiversity and the impacts of climate change on distribution patterns of marine life across marine UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The eDNA project is supported by citizen scientists and therefore has a strong awareness raising component. In the Wadden Sea, children are involved in sampling, with help of site managers and NGOs. Almost 90 citizen scientists aged 8–24, participated on foot and by boat. The sampling was organised together with the Danish Wadden Sea National Park, the German Wadden Sea National Park Authorities and the Dutch Waddenvereniging, and hence covered the entire length of the World Heritage Site – from North in Denmark to South in the Netherlands.

Sampling was conducted by

1. School children from Hjerting School near Esbjerg (Denmark);
2. Junior Rangers from the National Park Junior Ranger Programme in Nordstrand, Schleswig-Holstein (Germany);

3. Volunteers from the island of Neuwerk, Hamburg (Germany);
4. School class from Neues Gymnasium Wilhelmshaven in Wilhelmshaven, Lower Saxony (Germany);
5. School class from Sint Sebastianus (Ilpendam) UNESCO school at Marsdiep (Netherlands).

CWSS coordinated the sampling campaigns and joint effort to support both the eDNA expeditions initiative and, thereby, the global network, sharing a snapshot of marine life in our World Heritage Site. The Wadden Sea is of Outstanding Universal Value and is home to many species as well as of global importance for many migratory species such as marine mammals, birds, and fish.

The eDNA project focuses on fish and the snapshot data may complement regular fish monitoring in the Wadden Sea. The data collection period in all sites will end next year, in April 2023. All data will be made available to site management and be integrated into the open-access ocean database “UNESCO Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS)”. 



EAST ATLANTIC FLYWAY YOUTH FORUM

MORE THAN 30 YOUNG ADULTS LEARN TOOLS ON FUNDRAISING

The second East Atlantic Flyway Youth Forum (EAFYF) took place on 9 and 10 July 2022. More than 30 young people, aged 18-30, from along the East Atlantic Flyway signed up for the event, which focused on building youth capacity in project development and writing grant proposals. The idea for the fundraising training was developed based on the experiences and discussions at the EAFYF 2021. The declaration drafted by forum participants was a call for action, but also revealed that funds were urgently needed to implement activities on the ground and to ensure the outcomes are sustainable. Fundraising consultant Maaïke Manten was guiding the fun and interactive training, supported by first hand-experience shared by applicants and donors in the afternoon sessions.

“More than 30 young people, aged 18-30, from along the East Atlantic Flyway signed up for the event, which focused on building youth capacity in project development and writing grant proposals”



The first day of the Forum provided a platform for young conservationists Paul Ngafack and Walona Sehularo to share their inspiring experiences in the development and implementation of their conservation projects. On the second day, the participants learned about a donor’s perspective and expectations on grant applications, insights provided by Simon Mickleburgh from the Rufford Foundation and Sherilyn Bos from BirdLife International, working for the Conservation Leadership Programme.

The participants, both new and familiar faces from the 2021 Flyway Youth Forum, demonstrated great enthusiasm. Their eagerness to discuss and pose questions led to interesting discussions with the guest speakers, trainer and organisers. The goal of the organisers of the EAFYF was to give the young

participants the incentive to put their newly gained knowledge and skills from the training into action. Thus, Forum participants were given the opportunity to apply for a small grant of Ramsar’s Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness Programme (CEPA) to implement activities along the flyway within the framework of World Migratory Bird Day. From this, five projects were successfully sponsored in Benin, Sierra Leone, Gambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda.

The EAFYF is a collaborative effort between multiple organisations. In 2022, the Forum was organised by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat in collaboration with Migratory Birds for People (represented by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust) and Youth Engaged in Wetlands. The 2021 Forum led to



a cohort of Flyway Ambassadors, who continue to advocate for more youth engagement in flyway conservation along the East Atlantic Flyway.

WADDEN SEA FLYWAY INITIATIVE

GIVING A FRAME TO FUTURE ACTIVITIES

2022 has been a productive year for the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative (WSFI). The Initiative produced important reports and documents that will shape its activities over the coming years.

Based on the total counts of 2020, an overall assessment of the status of migratory waterbird populations along the East Atlantic Flyway (EAF) was conducted and published in May in the form of the 2020 EAF Assessment Report. The results revealed that over 30 per cent of the migratory waterbird populations assessed along this flyway are in decline. Negative trends were particularly pronounced among

wader species breeding in the Arctic. Species from southern Africa also showed negative trends. Environmental assessments at site level indicated regional differences in key threats to waterbird habitats, with recreation and tourism being among the main threats in Europe, while overfishing and firewood collection were more frequently named in West Africa. The results highlight the need to develop locally adapted solutions to address the threats leading to declines in migratory waterbird populations.

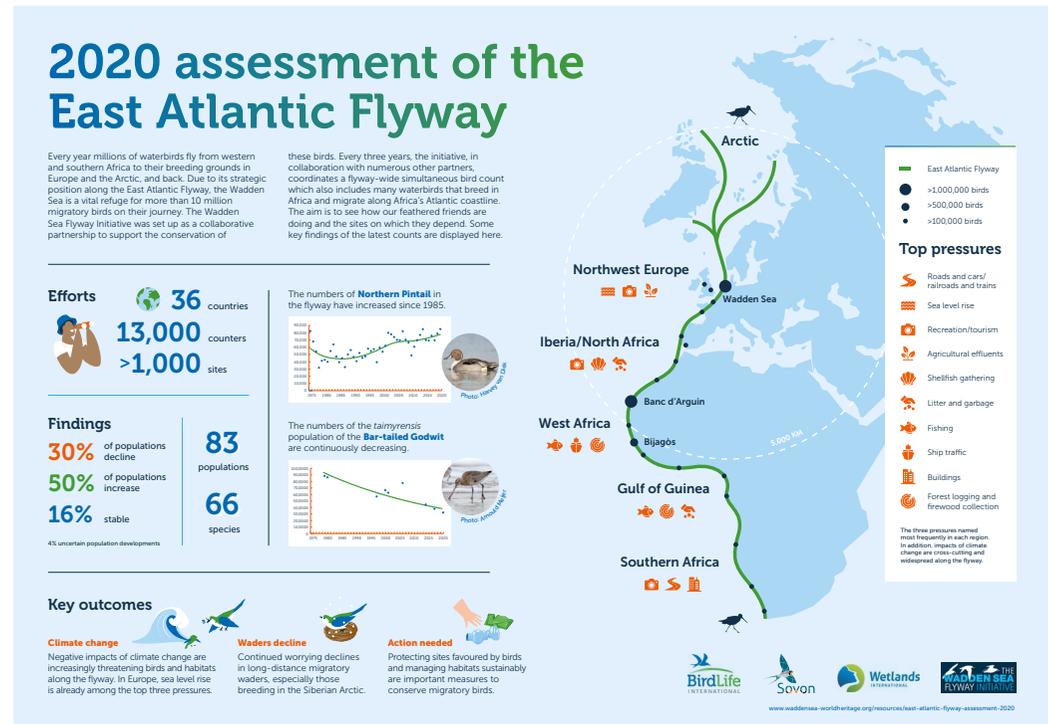
With its new Strategic Framework 2022–2029, the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative established an ambitious

outline for the upcoming years for the development and implementation of activities in aid of the recovery and stabilisation of waterbird populations along the flyway. The frameworks proposed are based on an assessment of the old WSFI Action Plan, the WSFI Fundraising Strategy, the latest results of the flyway monitoring programme, and an evaluation of the capacity building and management programme. Seven key objectives have been identified that, taken together, reflect the holistic approach towards supporting the conservation of the East Atlantic Flyway as a

whole. They focus on collaboration, monitoring, research, wise use of coastal resources, capacity building, policies, and legislation, as well as education and awareness (see figure on page 45). Activities conducted under each objective will have to be adapted to local conditions on the ground as well as flyway-wide trends.

The ambitious framework also reflects the development of the “Climate resilient East Atlantic Flyway project”, a collaborative initiative between local, regional, and international partners along the African part of the flyway.

Hosting large percentages of various flyway populations, Banc d’Arguin in Mauritania, the Bijagós Archipelago in Guinea Bissau, and the Saloum Delta in Senegal will be the focus areas of the project. The sustainable solutions for environmental issues to be developed, tested, and implemented will also be upscaled to other parts of the flyway. An expression of interest was submitted to the German Climate Initiative, upon the approval of which a full project proposal can be developed under careful consideration of the input provided by local and international actors.



TRILATERAL MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME

Close collaborations are essential to achieve the WSFI vision that migratory birds find lasting refuge along the East Atlantic Flyway (EAF). The WSFI is calling upon new partners to reach out and take part in the conservation of migratory birds along the EAF.



- Strengthen and maintain effective cooperation with partners
- Monitor the status of waterbirds and their habitats along the EAF
- Determine the (changing) status of waterbirds and their sites and habitats
- Investigate causes and mechanisms behind changes in the status of waterbirds and impacts on key sites, considering the impact of climate change
- Improve recommendations for evidence-based solutions for adaptive management
- Exchange of knowledge and expertise that benefit flyway conservation and thus the connectivity between sites along the EAF
- Improved management of key coastal sites for migratory waterbirds
- Improved management of key breeding sites for migratory waders in the Arctic
- Identify and support sustainable community-led initiatives at key sites
- Intensify collaborations among World Heritage sites
- Develop an integrated capacity building programme for the EAF
- Implement an integrated capacity building programme for the EAF
- Strengthen the EAF Coastal Waterbird Conservation Network
- Improved status of migratory waterbirds and their sites through advocacy interventions
- Climate and biodiversity policies are streamlined
- Private sector advocacy
- Enhanced awareness of the EAF and the key threats for flyway conservation
- Enhanced engagement of children and youth through a targeted education programme
- Enhanced engagement of communities through local level actions and wetland centres

WADDEN SEA FACES

MARRE WALTER

*“Only when the
three countries
work together
can we truly
protect it”*



Marre Walter on the mudflats © Private

BEHEERAUTORITEIT WADDENZEE



The Dutch Wadden Sea Management Authority, **Beheerautoriteit Waddenzee**, was founded in March 2020 by the **Ministers of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and of Infrastructure and Water Management** together with the provinces of **Noord-Holland, Fryslân and Groningen**. The aim of the Management Authority is to achieve more **coherent and coordinated management** of the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site in the area of **nature, fish, and water management**. The purpose is not to manage the Dutch Wadden Sea, but to help the different managing organisations to look at their management at a **national level** and decide on measures together. The Authority is currently busy developing a **management plan for the Dutch area**, which will also include the corresponding parts of the trilateral single integrated management plan.

Cultural anthropologist by education, Marre Walter has years of professional experience in organisational advice and coaching. At the beginning of 2018, Marre took over the role as Interim Director of the Waddenfonds. Since March 2020, she has been the Director of Beheerautoriteit Waddenzee. The interview was held by Annika Bostelmann.

Why are you engaged in the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation?

I'm engaged in the TWSC because the Wadden Sea is one ecological system that you cannot solely look at from a national perspective. To treat the area as an entity, the trilateral perspective is essential. And we have to cooperate to make the whole system better. Only when the three countries work together can we truly protect it. Also, the engagement is one of my assignments.

What does the Wadden Sea mean to you?

The Wadden Sea is such an important part of our global ecosystem. And it demonstrates why nature is so important for human beings to exist. You can visit a park with nice nature exhibitions and signs telling you all about it. But the Wadden Sea lets you experience the incredible force and greatness of nature. It reminds us how small we are compared to nature. The Wadden Sea lets me feel, see, and live that fact and also reminds me of nature's fragility.

What is the image in your mind when you think of the Wadden Sea?

Water. Water and tides. When I think of the Wadden Sea I see water, how it retreats and how it comes back, and I feel the force of the tides.

What is the most special place for you in the Wadden Sea?

My special Wadden Sea place is Terschelling. Being there on the Wadden Sea side, early morning or late afternoon, and looking over the water. The wind in your hair. You can watch birds, some ships, and, depending on the weather, even Harlingen. I love watching the sunset and the moon rise. The darkness over there lets you see a completely different starlit sky compared to the mainland.

In your eyes, what will the Wadden Sea look like in 2050? What message do you want to give to the next generation?

I hope that the Wadden Sea of 2050 will look like it does now, keeping its openness and the way of the tides. I hope that sea level rise will not cause the Wadden Sea to disappear and that living on Terschelling you don't have to constantly be afraid of the sea. Essentially, I hope for my kids and their kids to look at the Wadden Sea in 2050 and still experience what I experience now.

And my message to the next generation is this: Be wiser than we are. Be humbler than we are. Use your eyes and your gut feeling to do the right thing. And don't base your decisions on economic growth. 

Marre Walter © Private



2023

OUTLOOK

March 2023

With a Wadden Sea Board, three task groups, and numerous expert, net-working, working, and *ad-hoc* groups, each meeting about twice a year, the calendar of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC) is quite full. On top of these “working” meetings, this section highlights some upcoming events to mark in your agendas. Public events can also be found at www.waddensea-worldheritage.org/events.

The scale of the recent outbreak of the avian influenza virus (bird flu) among Sandwich terns (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) in the Wadden Sea and beyond is unprecedented. While definite numbers are hard to get for this highly mobile species, many breeding colonies of Sandwich terns in the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea have been largely deserted. In October 2022, scientists, site managers, and policy makers working on sandwich terns in the Wadden Sea or adjacent colonies, as well as experts on the bird flu virus and its transmission in colony breeding birds for a first online bird-flu workshop with a focus on the recent outbreak of the birdflu in Sandwich terns. An in-person follow-up is planned for March 2023.

Spring and Autumn 2023

After a year of a Wadden Sea Board meetings marathon prior to the Trilateral Governmental Conference 2022, only two meetings are planned in 2023, the first in spring, the second in autumn. The Wadden Sea Board is the governing body of the TWSC. It runs and oversees the work of the TWSC between sessions of the Trilateral Governmental Conference (TGC), preparing, adopting, and implementing the Wadden Sea Plan, as well as policies and strategies.





Aerial of salt marshes and dunes © Cris Toala Oliveres



July and October 2023

One of the important duties carried out by the TWSC is the annual counts of grey and harbour seals. Every winter, grey seal counts are carried out trilaterally and a summary report is released at the start of July. Equally, every summer the harbour seals are also counted, with details of their current state being reported at the beginning of November. The work is an integral part of the Wadden Sea Seal Agreement. ~~~~

August 2023

Fully booked, the Wadden Sea Day in 2022 sparked intriguing discussions dedicated to the Wadden Sea food web. We also took the opportunity and celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Wadden Sea Seal Agreement. The Wadden Sea Day is not only a chance to do a deep-dive into a specific area of work related to the Wadden Sea, it is also an exceptional opportunity for networking. As usual, in 2023, the event will be held on the last Thursday in August in Wilhelmshaven. ~~~~

September 2023

Managers of the 50 UNESCO World Heritage marine sites regularly come together to share their best practices, discuss solutions, and forge a path forward together. As local guardians of the world's most iconic Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), they have confronted every imaginable problem facing our oceans and many have created leading edge solutions. The fifth edition will be held in the Wadden Sea (Denmark, Germany, Netherlands) from 18-21 September 2023. The conference will build on previous editions held in Hawaii, USA (2010), Scandola Reserve, France (2013), Galapagos Islands, Ecuador (2016), and Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, USA (2019). ~~~~

WADDEN SEA

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Executive Secretary, Common Wadden Sea Secretariat

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